

JOBS FOR APRIL IN THE VEG GARDEN

April (mid-Spring) can be an exciting month in the garden. Temperatures should start to rise and light levels will increase as the days lengthen.



All vegetable plants need light and warmth to grow well and for photosynthesis to take place. Photosynthesis is the process where the plant makes its own food, usually in the leaves. So as all the levels increase, and aided by a regular supply of water, the plants will feed and grow stronger and faster.



April is therefore the month of sowing and planting, but care should still be taken to protect crops from frost – either by putting up cloches (see jobs archive February) or covering beds with horticultural fleece or newspaper.

1. Whether you choose to [chit potatoes](#), they can be planted out in April. Second earlies can be sown at the beginning of the month and maincrops at the end. However, some gardeners are planting maincrops with the earlies in an attempt to prevent damage from blight.
2. If you started to sow seeds outside last month under a cloche, check whether they need watering or thinning yet.
3. Keep weeding. Sometimes it feels like weeds have a knack of growing faster than our crops, so remove them while they're still young or they'll take all the nutrients from the soil, depleting the vegetable seedlings. Whilst you're weeding try and identify them which will help you manage them.
4. If you haven't already done so, put up pea supports – either sticks if you're growing dwarf varieties or something more substantial for others.

Quick tip – if you're using a pea support like the one pictured on the right, put a layer of cardboard, black plastic or weed membrane between the rows to prevent weeds growing up the middle.



5. If you've prepared the soil, lots of vegetables can be sown directly now. These include Brussels sprouts, kale, Swiss chard, broad beans, onions, perpetual spinach, summer cauliflower, leeks, lettuce, radish, turnips, and kohlrabi. Beetroot, carrots and peas can also be sown directly but be guided by seed packets (or expert books) for particular varieties. Some vegetables (such as onions and beetroot bolt [see glossary](#) if they're sown too early).

6. If you haven't done so already, now is the time to sow sweet peppers, tomatoes, cucumbers, aubergines, pumpkins, courgettes and squashes indoors, as they need warmth to germinate.
7. If you've sown any seeds indoors during March such as tomatoes, you may need to pot them into larger pots when their true leaves develop (the second set of leaves that develop after the first set of 'seed or true' leaves).
8. If you have the space you can prepare a seedbed. This is an area used to raise seedlings, usually the brassicas (sprouting broccoli, cabbages and cauliflowers). Calabrese doesn't like to be transplanted from a seedbed so either start it off in modules or plant it in situ. Brassicas are very slow growing so by starting them off in a seed (or nursery bed); the main beds can be used for growing other crops.
9. If you live in a very sheltered area, you can sow sweetcorn and French beans under a cloche.
10. Don't forget to plant [companion plants](#) – cornflowers, poppies, marigolds and nasturtiums.

What you can sow outside now...

Lots of veg can be planted directly into the soil from now on. Try to avoid planting all your seeds at once, but sow successionally. As a general guide, when you start to see your seedlings appear, sow the next batch – usually every two or three weeks.

Broad beans	Peas
Turnips	Brussels sprouts
Sprouting broccoli	Calabrese
Kale	Leeks
Lettuce	Beetroot (bolt resistant)
Parsnip	Carrots
Mini cauliflowers	Globe artichokes
Autumn & winter cabbage	Japanese bunching onions (& pickling)
Parsley	Radish
Rhubarb	Summer spinach
Spinach beet	

What you can sow using heat (or indoors)...

Peppers	Pumpkins
Courgettes	Aubergines
Cucumbers	Winter squash
Tomatoes	

What you can sow undercover...

Runner beans (late April)	Celery
Celeriac	Autumn & mini cauliflowers
Sweetcorn	Cucumber
Courgettes	Tomatoes
Rhubarb	

Tip for April

Making a Seed Bed

A seed bed doesn't need to be very big – about a metre square is sufficient. It does need to be in an open, sunny position though to give the seedlings the best start in life.



The soil should be well prepared – light, well drained, free of weeds and stones. Check the pH – neutral is best between 6.5 and 7. It doesn't need to be too fertile either as seeds contain everything they need to germinate.

To get a fine tilth suitable for sowing seeds, rake the soil gently backwards and forth when it's neither too wet nor too dry. Tiny seeds will need a finer tilth than larger ones.

Cats seem to love rolling in seedbeds so consider enclosing the area with wire netting until the seedlings are larger, or string black cotton over the bed to deter birds.

Sow the seeds in drills (see picture above) and as they start to grow either move them to a 'holding bed' (like a seedbed only larger) or transplant them (move) to their final positions.

Before moving them, water both the seedbed and the soil into which the plants will move to. *"You'd never move house before having a cup of tea."*

Note: Avoid planting calabrese in a seed bed as it does not like to be transplanted.