

# JOBS FOR MARCH IN THE VEG GARDEN

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March, known in the gardening calendar as Early Spring, can be one of the busiest for us gardeners.



Our seed tins will be bulging with seeds telling us that they should be sown this month but this is a month of patience.... We have to keep an eye on the weather.

As a new gardener one thing you'll start to become aware of are the changing seasons - what direction the winds come from, how cold or strong they are, how much it rains, where there are frost pockets or sunny/shady spots. It can be a revelation! And if you're not used to working outside you'll begin to experience the joy of getting in tune with nature.

To get the best start from your vegetable garden it pays to start making note of your [weather patterns](#)– it will help you with your decision on when to start to sow.

1. If you live in a cold region you can get a head start by warming up your soil. Cover it with clear polythene or horticultural fleece (available from garden centres). Remember to weigh it down well to prevent it blowing away. As temperatures rise, remove the plastic and prepare your soil for sowing. If you're in a milder area you can start to cultivate and prepare your beds for sowing without covering them. Don't attempt to work on the soil if it's too wet, frozen or sticky or you may damage its structure.
2. If you haven't already done so, start chitting early [potatoes](#). Earlies are traditionally planted out in mid-March but in colder areas wait until April (if you haven't warmed up the soil first). Don't forget that potatoes are frost tender so be ready to cover them with fleece or newspaper if frosts threaten.
3. Shallots, garlic and onion sets can all be planted out this month. They prefer a soil that's been manured several months before sowing or they can grow too lush. Look out for garlic bulbs that can be sown in the spring such as 'Solent White' or 'Vallelado' and if it's cold, hold off planting till the end of the month.
4. Weather permitting you can start to **sow outside** broad beans, peas, carrots, parsnips, leeks, beetroot, radish, lettuce, spinach, summer cabbage, summer cauliflower, kohlrabi, turnips and Swiss chard.



[Cloches](#) can be used to protect crops. Vegetables may [bolt](#) if they're sown too early and aren't protected.

5. If budget and space allows, consider installing a greenhouse or polytunnel. Even a mini greenhouse will help you to start seeds off.

All the vegetables mentioned (in 4 above) can be sown directly into the soil, although starting some off (like beans or peas) indoors will give them a head start.

6. Mediterranean fruit and veg such as tomatoes, cucumbers, aubergines and peppers need a longer growing season and warmer growing temperatures (which is why we start them off indoors). They should all be started off undercover in a frost-free environment, and unless you sow outdoor varieties suitable for our climate they may have to remain there. If you don't have a greenhouse, how about planting one or two pots of dwarf tomatoes (such as Garden Pearl) on windowsills or in front of sunny patio doors.

Remember to harden off all plants that have been started off indoors by introducing them to outdoor temperatures gradually (*yes, that means bringing them in and out of doors daily for a couple of weeks so they acclimatise gradually unless you have a [cold frame](#)*).

7. If you managed to sow some spring cabbages last year, they will benefit from a feed such as chicken pellets or Blood, Fish and Bone in March.
8. If you started growing last year, you may still be able to harvest parsnips, spring cabbage, Brussels sprouts and leeks.
9. If your soil isn't too sticky, start hoeing it regularly to keep annual weeds under control. Dig out the roots of perennial weeds (such as docks, creeping buttercups, bindweed and couch grass) – you'll save yourself lots of weeding later if you catch them now.

## Tip for March

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### Look After Your Seeds - Make a Seed Tin/Box

Most seeds can remain viable for several years if kept in a cool, dry environment - the cooler the better. By keeping your seeds in an airtight tin or container in a cool, dry room (or even in the fridge) you'll increase their storage life.



Never store seeds in plastic bags – keep them in the foil packets they arrive in or in paper packets.

To help with your sowing plans, make some monthly divider cards and pop them in the tin. Then look at the recommended sowing dates and place the packets in the appropriate month. *(You can see in the picture above that March and April are bulging).* If you're really organised you could add a couple of sub-dividers for the busier months to help with successional sowing. Once you've sown enough seeds for a row or a seed tray, just pop the packet into the next section. This will act as a reminder next time you open the tin.

Always check the use by dates and use those seeds first. You can check their viability by placing a few seeds onto a dish covered with damp kitchen paper, wrapping the dish in a plastic bag and placing them somewhere warm. If none have germinated within a couple of weeks buy new ones.

Some seeds, such as parsnips, will only remain viable the year you buy them so use them up or give the extras to friends.

Several will last three or four years such as brassicas. Some can last up to ten years such as tomatoes and beans.

Talk to vegetable growing friends and have a seed swap... you never know what you might end up with!