

Too Early to Plant?
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For Week of May 3, 2010

During this time of the year it seems everyone is wondering if it is too early to plant a garden. Many times my answer depends on how the caller views the situation. Much information is available for field crops and planting dates, but what is really important is the economics and the reality of “making hay when the sun shines”. When everyone is busy you must be willing to think outside of the box or you may miss your opportunity. With gardening the situation is a bit different. Gardeners are able to spend a little more time tenderly caring for their plants as the season progresses. In the garden you can protect your crop from pests, disease, weather, and other factors without considering economics. Commercial producers must consider economics in every decision they make.

Gardening is a whole different can of worms. Up until now planting cold season crops like cabbage, peas, lettuce, carrots, and radishes have been recommended. Cabbage for instance enjoys cool temperatures. Warm season crops like tomatoes, peppers, beans, sweet corn, and melons should not be planted until after May 15, as this is the average last frost date for our area. I even suggest gardeners wait until around June 1st to plant these crops just to be sure frost will not hamper our efforts. Some people try to plant these crops early in order to get a jump on the growing season; however, cool soil temperature restricts growth of these vegetables and it may take several weeks for them to get going again. Gardeners can use black plastic mulch to increase the soil and air temperatures around these plants, making it possible to plant a bit earlier.

Early planting of vegetables enables the gardener to grow more than one crop of some vegetables. Short season crops like radishes can be double or even triple cropped depending on the weather. Being the first to have home grown tomatoes is a real boost to ones gardening ego. A better way to get that distinguished honor is to plant early ripening varieties. Varieties with different rates of maturity can be grown to ensure that tomatoes are fresh from August into October. For example, tomato varieties range from 60 to 80 days to maturity. Remember to choose varieties that are resistant to diseases like verticillium and fusarium wilt. Similar maturation rates can be found in sweet corn, peas, peppers, and cabbage. A little thought into the varieties used can go a long way depending on your individual desired gardening results. When early varieties are finished producing the garden space can be used for a crop of radishes, as they mature in 20 to 30 days.

Spring planting conditions can be very interesting as we are often dealt rain, snow, hail, freezing temperatures, and hot spells. Weather is always a factor when planning crops whether you are grow acres of a crop or a small 10 X 20 garden plot. Keep in mind that the weather will change and you must just go with the flow. Things will work out for the better in the long run.

For additional information please call me at 605-394-2188 or email to ricky.abrahamson@sdstate.edu. Be sure to watch Garden Line for up to date gardening information on Tuesday evenings on South Dakota Public Broadcasting. Garden Line airs at 7 PM central/6 PM mountain time.