

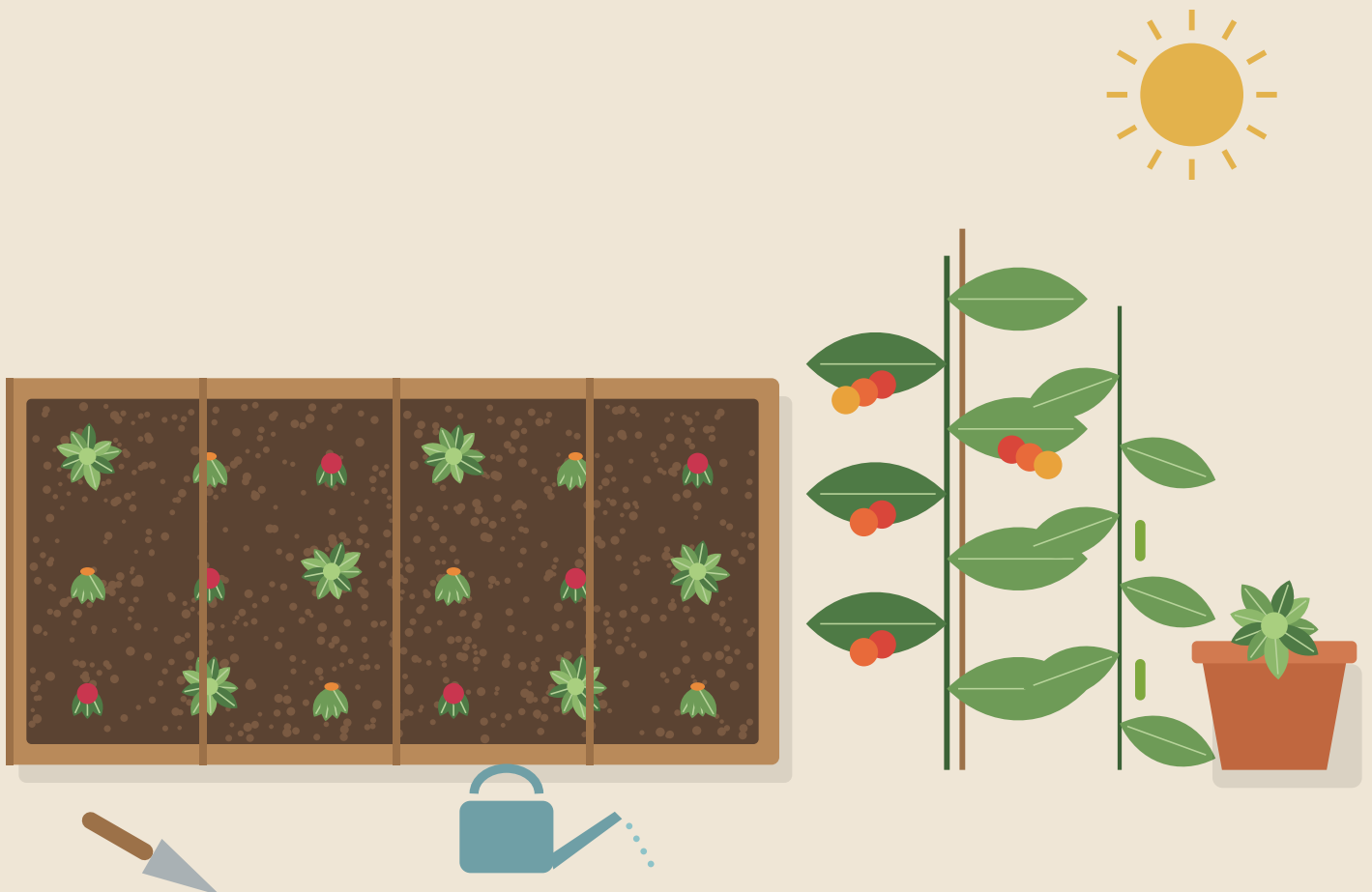
The First Harvest Garden Planner

Grow your first vegetables in a bed,
a balcony or a few pots.

PLAN · SOW · GROW · HARVEST

A season plan + six printable worksheets

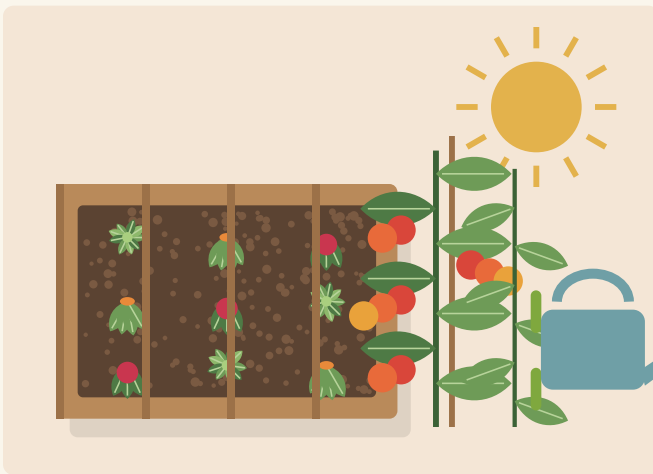
STUDIO SAMPLE · GENERAL GARDENING GUIDANCE



A small garden you actually finish.

Most first gardens fail from being too big, too ambitious or too late. This planner helps you start small, choose crops you will eat, and follow a simple season from first sowing to first harvest.

You do not need acres, a greenhouse or special tools. A sunny patch, a raised bed or a few deep containers on a balcony is enough to grow salad, herbs, beans and tomatoes. The Royal Horticultural Society's advice for beginners is refreshingly simple: grow only what you really like, and remember that space will be your biggest limitation. [3] This planner turns that into a plan.



By the end, you will have...

A sun map of your space, a bed or container plan, a crop shortlist, a sowing calendar built from your frost dates, a weekly care log and a harvest record for next year.

How to use this edition

Read pages 4-9 to plan your space. Use pages 10-15 to choose crops and schedule sowing. Pages 16-23 cover watering, care and harvest. Print the worksheets on pages 24-29 and keep the summary on page 30.

A STUDIO SAMPLE, READ THIS FIRST

Created by Forgewick in September 2026 to show the quality of our ebook work. It is general gardening guidance: climates, soils and local rules vary, so always check seed packets and your local horticultural or extension service. A partner edition is built from the creator's own growing experience, region and methods.

Four sections. One first season.

Follow the whole guide, or tap a section to go straight to what you need today.

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- | | | |
|----|--|----|
| 01 | Plan your space | 04 |
| | Sun, size, beds or pots, soil and climate. | |
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- | | | |
|----|---|----|
| 02 | Choose and schedule crops | 10 |
| | A beginner shortlist, seed packets, a sowing calendar and a bed plan. | |
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|----|---|----|
| 03 | Grow, care and harvest | 16 |
| | Watering, mulch, feeding, frost, harvest and a worked season. | |
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- | | | |
|----|--|----|
| 04 | Keep the useful tools | 24 |
| | Six printable worksheets and a one-page summary. | |
-

The goal is not a perfect garden. It is a first harvest you are proud of, and notes that make next year easier.

Start with what you will eat.

The best first crops are the ones you already buy every week.

01 Grow what you really like

The RHS advises growing only what you really like and keeping experiments to a minimum. [3] Write down the vegetables and herbs your household eats most.

02 Let space decide

Space will be the greatest limitation on what you can grow. [3] A small space is not a problem; it just means choosing compact crops.

03 Choose compact varieties

If space is at a premium, look for dwarf selections and bush forms. [3] Seed packets usually say “bush”, “dwarf” or “patio”.

04 Keep your first garden small

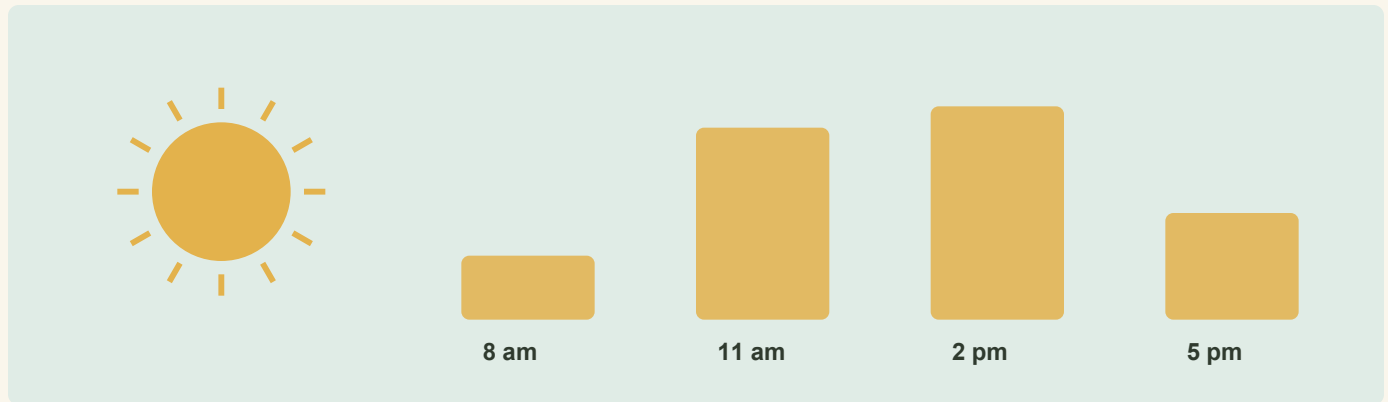
A University of Connecticut guide suggests starting small; a plot of about 10 by 10 feet (3 by 3 m) is enough to produce vegetables while staying manageable. [1] A single raised bed or a few pots is smaller still, and that is fine.

TRY THIS NOW

List five vegetables or herbs you buy most often. Circle the three you would most love to pick fresh. Those are your first-season shortlist candidates for Worksheet 3.

Find your sun.

Sunlight is the one thing you cannot add later, so map it first.



Most fruiting vegetables want a full-sun spot. The University of Connecticut defines full sun as 6 to 8 hours of sun per day. [1] Many leafy crops and herbs are more forgiving; check each seed packet for its sun needs.

01 Watch one sunny day

Check your space at 8 am, 11 am, 2 pm and 5 pm. Note where the sun falls and where shadows from walls, fences or balconies land.

02 Count the hours

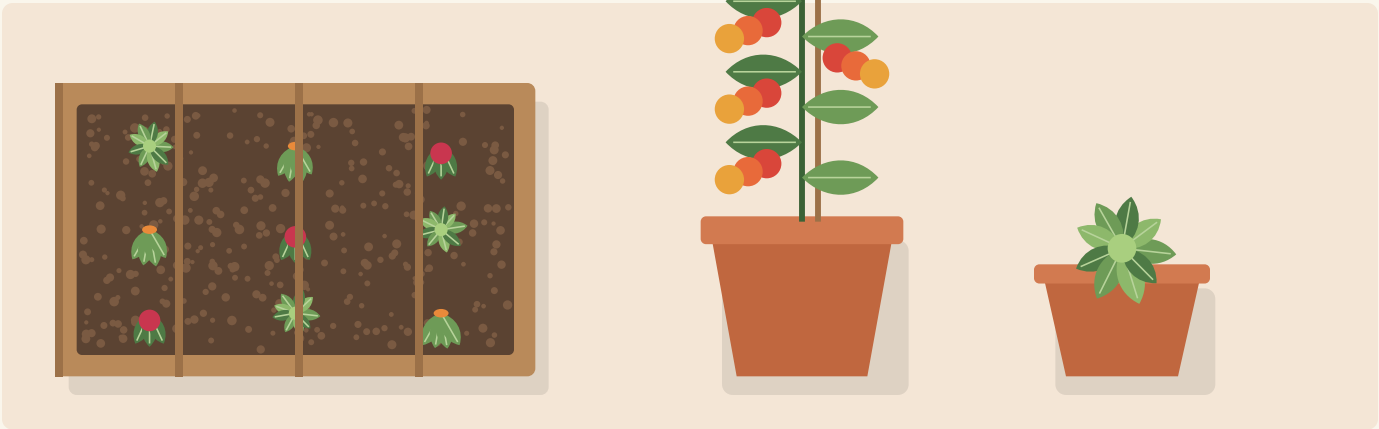
Add up roughly how many hours each spot gets. Record it on Worksheet 1.

03 Match crops to spots

Put sun-lovers like tomatoes and beans in the brightest place, and leafy crops in the spots with less light.

Beds, ground or containers?

There is no wrong answer. Choose the one that fits your space, budget and back.

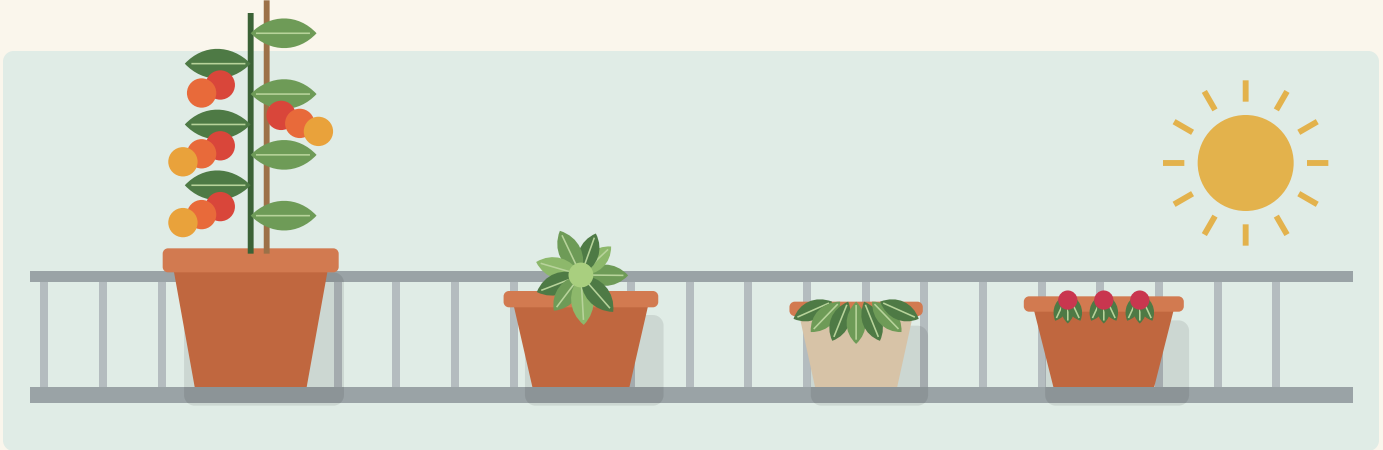


Option	Good for	Keep in mind
In-ground plot	Gardens with decent soil and room to spread	Start small, around 10 x 10 ft at most [1]
Raised bed	Poor or compacted soil, easier reach, tidy look	Needs filling with good soil or compost
Containers	Balconies, patios, renters, tiny yards	At least 45 cm (18 in) deep and wide where possible [2]

You can mix all three: a raised bed for salads and a few big pots of tomatoes by a sunny wall is a classic first garden.

Growing on a balcony or patio.

Containers make growing possible almost anywhere with light.



01 Go deep

The RHS suggests containers with a depth and width of at least 45 cm (18 in); smaller pots need more frequent watering and feeding. [2]

02 Use the right compost

Fill pots with a peat-free potting compost suited to containers, such as multi-purpose or container compost. [2]

03 Pick container-friendly crops

Salad leaves, rocket, radishes, herbs, dwarf French beans, peas, tomatoes, chillies and peppers are all suggested by the RHS for containers. [2]

CHECK BEFORE YOU LOAD UP

Wet compost and pots are heavy. Check your building's rules and your balcony's limits before placing large containers, and make sure water can drain away safely.

Soil and compost, simply.

Healthy soil does most of the work for you.

01 Test before you guess

A soil test is recommended before a new plot. [1] Many regions offer low-cost tests through a university extension service or a garden centre.

02 Add organic matter

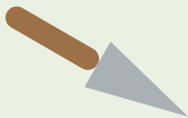
Well-rotted compost improves most garden soils. Spread it over the bed before planting, following your soil test advice.

03 Fresh compost for pots

Containers need potting compost rather than garden soil. Choose a peat-free multi-purpose or container compost. [2]

04 Mulch around plants

Mulch spread around plants, but not touching them, blocks light to weed seeds in the soil. [1]



Know your climate and frost dates.

Two dates shape your whole calendar: your last spring frost and your first autumn frost.

Frost dates vary by place, so find the averages for your area from your national weather service, local extension service or gardening society. As one example, the University of Connecticut gives 15 May as the average last spring frost in Connecticut and 15 September as the average first autumn frost. [1]

Crop type	When to plant outdoors	Examples
Cool-season	As early as the soil can be worked [1]	Lettuce, radishes, peas, spinach
Warm-season	After all danger of frost has passed [1]	Tomatoes, beans, peppers, squash, cucumbers

In the US: hardiness zones

The USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map is based on the average annual extreme minimum winter temperature, and you can look up your zone by ZIP code. [4] It tells you about winter cold, which matters most for perennials; for vegetables, your frost dates matter more.

OUTSIDE THE US

Use your country’s frost-date guidance. In the Southern Hemisphere the calendar is reversed: spring sowing happens around September to November.

Cool-season and warm-season crops.

Sorting your shortlist into two groups makes the calendar easy.



Cool-season crops

Tolerate cool weather and are planted as early as the soil can be worked. [1] Good first choices: lettuce and salad leaves, radishes, peas, spinach and rocket.

Warm-season crops

Are damaged by frost and go outdoors only after all danger of frost has passed. [1] Good first choices: bush beans, cherry or patio tomatoes, peppers and courgettes (zucchini).

Always follow the specific timing on each seed packet; varieties differ.

A beginner shortlist.

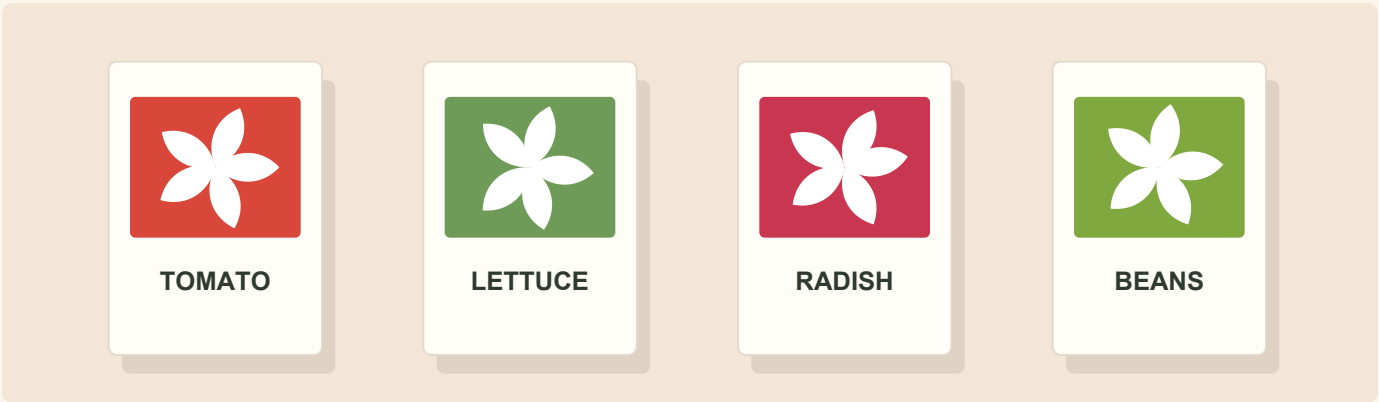
Ten forgiving crops. Pick three to six for your first season.

Crop	Bed or pot?	Why beginners like it
Salad leaves / rocket	Both	Quick to pick; cut a few leaves at a time
Radishes	Both	Fast and easy to sow direct
Peas	Both, with support	Cool-season; kids love picking them
Dwarf French / bush beans	Both	Compact; no tall supports needed
Cherry or patio tomatoes	Both, deep pot	Big reward from one plant
Herbs (parsley, chives, basil)	Both	Pick a little often; basil is warm-season
Chillies and peppers	Pot in a warm, sunny spot	Container-friendly [2]
Beetroot	Both	Leaves and roots both edible
Salad onions	Both	Small space, quick harvest
Potatoes	Bed or big container	Fun to dig; suggested for containers [2]

Container suitability for these crops is based on the RHS list. [2] Choose from what you actually eat. [3]

Read a seed packet in one minute.

Everything your calendar needs is usually printed on the back.



On the packet	Copy it to your planner as
Sow indoors / sow outdoors dates	Your sowing window, relative to frost
Sowing depth and spacing	Notes for sowing day
Days to maturity or harvest time	Your expected harvest month
Sun and height	Where it goes in your space
“Bush”, “dwarf” or “patio”	A sign it suits small spaces [3]

Keep the packets in a zip bag or photograph them. Worksheet 4 has space for each crop’s key details.

Build your sowing calendar.

Work backwards and forwards from your average last spring frost.

01 Write your last frost date at the centre

Use the local average (page 9). Everything else is placed relative to it.

02 Place cool-season crops early

Plant them as early as the soil can be worked. [1] Many can be sown again every few weeks for a longer harvest.

03 Place warm-season crops after frost

Plant tomatoes, beans and peppers outdoors only after all danger of frost has passed. [1] If a seed packet says to start indoors, count back the weeks it gives.

04 Mark your first autumn frost

This is roughly when warm-season crops finish outdoors.

Example (fictional), last frost 15 May	Plan
Early April	Sow peas, radishes and lettuce outdoors
Late March / April	Start tomatoes and peppers indoors (check packets)
After 15 May	Plant out tomatoes and peppers; sow beans
June to August	Sow more lettuce and radishes every few weeks

Plan the bed or pots on paper.

Five minutes with a pencil saves overcrowding later.



A fictional 4 x 8 ft bed, split into 1 ft squares: tall crops on the side that will not shade the others, quick salads in between.

01 Draw your space to scale

Use the grid on Worksheet 2: one square per foot, or per pot.

02 Place tall crops so they do not shade others

Think about where the sun comes from (page 5).

03 Follow packet spacing

Crowded plants compete for light and water. Leave room to reach in.

Sow a little, often.

Small, repeated sowings give a steadier harvest than one big sowing.

Quick crops like salad leaves and radishes are ready in weeks, then they are gone. Sowing a short row or a pot every few weeks, following the packet timing, keeps something ready to pick for longer and avoids a glut.



Leave gaps on purpose

An empty square in May is a place for a second sowing in June. Mark planned gaps on your bed plan so they do not get filled on impulse.

TOO MUCH AT ONCE?

If everything is ready in the same week, share it, or sow smaller amounts next time. Record what happened in your harvest log (Worksheet 6); it is the most useful note for next year.

Watering without guesswork.

More first gardens are lost to watering than to anything else.



01 **Beds: think in inches per week**

Vegetables need one to two inches of water per week from rain or hose. [1] A simple rain gauge or a straight-sided tin shows how much rain fell.

02 **Containers: keep a steady supply**

The RHS advises a constant water supply for container crops, while avoiding prolonged waterlogging. [2] Pots dry out faster than beds, especially small ones. [2]

03 **Check the soil, not the calendar**

Push a finger into the soil; if it feels dry below the surface, water. Water the soil at the base rather than the leaves.

LOG IT

A tick on Worksheet 5 each time you water shows patterns fast, like a pot that always dries out by Thursday.

Mulch and weeds.

A little prevention means much less weeding.

01 Mulch after planting

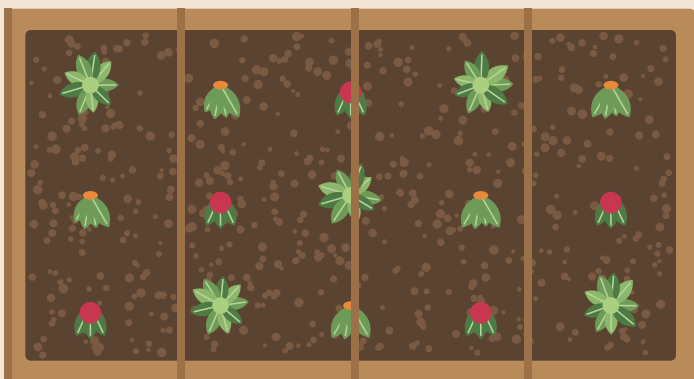
Apply mulch around plants, but not touching them, to block light to weed seeds. [1] Straw, shredded leaves or compost are common choices.

02 Weed little and often

Five minutes twice a week is easier than an hour once a month. Pull weeds when they are small and the soil is damp.

03 Walk the garden

A short daily look is the best early-warning system for pests, dry soil and ripe crops.



Feeding, simply.

Beds and pots have different needs.

Where	What to do
Beds and plots	Start with a soil test and follow its recommendations. [1] Adding compost each year helps most soils.
Containers	A general-purpose liquid feed every two weeks is the RHS suggestion for container crops. [2]
Fruiting crops in pots	Tomatoes and peppers are hungry; follow the feed label and do not overdo it.

Follow the label

Use any fertiliser exactly as the label says. More is not better: too much feed can damage plants and wash away.



Protect young plants from frost.

A late frost can undo weeks of work in one night.

01 Watch the forecast in spring

Especially around your average last frost date, and again in autumn.

02 Cover and move

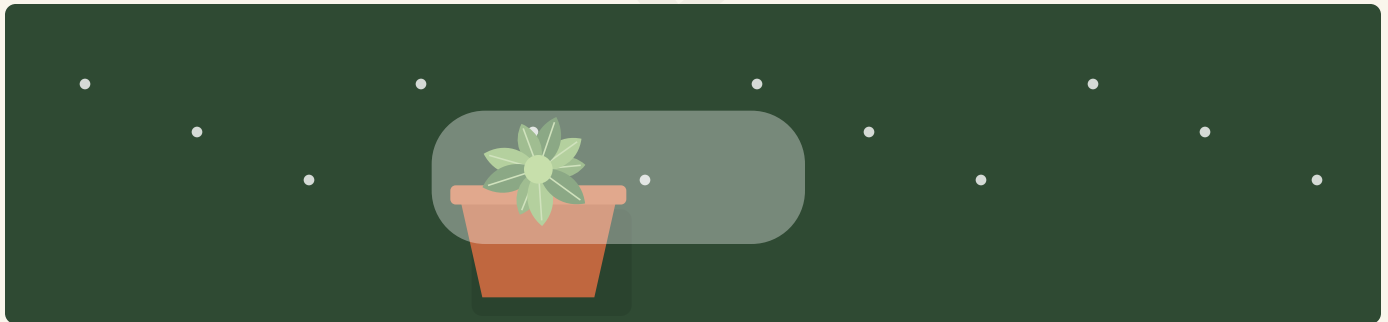
If frost is likely, cover plants with horticultural fleece and move pots to a warm, sheltered spot. [2]

03 Harden off indoor-sown plants

Seedlings raised indoors need a week or two of gradually longer spells outside before planting out. Check seed packets for guidance.

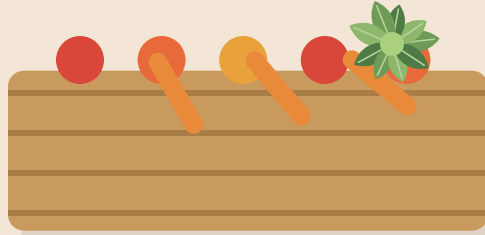
04 Wait for warm-season crops

Tomatoes, beans and peppers go out after all danger of frost has passed. [1]



Harvest and enjoy.

Picking regularly is part of growing.



01 Pick little and often

Many crops, such as beans and salad leaves, keep producing when picked regularly. Harvest in the cool of the morning when you can.

02 Wash before eating

Wash produce under running water before preparing or eating it; soap, detergent or commercial produce washes are not recommended. [5]

03 Scrub and dry

Scrub firm produce with a clean brush, then dry with a clean cloth or paper towel. [5]

04 Record it

Note what you picked and when on Worksheet 6. Next year you will know exactly what to grow more, or less, of.

A worked first season.

A fictional example of how the planner fits together. Adapt it; do not copy it.

When	What happens	Worksheet
Winter	Chooses five crops the family eats; maps sun on the balcony and one bed.	1, 3
4-6 weeks before last frost	Draws the bed plan; builds the sowing calendar from a 15 May frost.	2, 4
Early spring	Sows peas, radishes and lettuce outdoors; starts tomatoes indoors.	4, 5
After last frost	Plants out tomatoes in 45 cm pots; sows bush beans.	5
Summer	Waters to the soil; liquid-feeds pots every two weeks; resows salads.	5
Late summer / autumn	Harvests, logs yields and notes what to change next year.	6

Fictional teaching example. It does not describe a real garden, climate or guaranteed yield.

When something goes wrong.

It will. Every gardener loses plants. Notice, note and learn.

You notice	First things to check
Wilting in the afternoon	Is the soil dry below the surface? Is the pot too small for the plant?
Seeds did not come up	Sowing date, depth and temperature against the packet; old seed
Leggy, pale seedlings	Not enough light; move to the brightest spot
Holes in leaves	Look closely morning and evening; identify before treating
Everything ready at once	Sow smaller amounts more often next time (page 15)

IDENTIFY BEFORE YOU ACT

For pests and diseases, identify the problem first using your national horticultural society or local extension service, and follow product labels exactly if you choose to use any treatment.

The notes that make next year easier.

Your records are the most valuable thing your first season produces.

What grew well, and where

Your sun map plus results shows the best spot for each crop.

What you would grow more of

The harvest log tells you, not your memory.

Sowing dates that worked

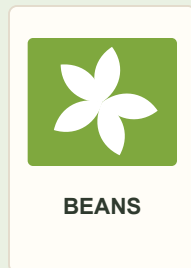
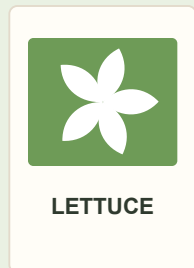
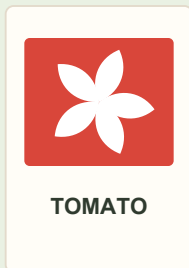
Real dates beat general advice for your exact space.

Varieties to repeat or drop

Keep packet photos with your notes.

One change for next year

Just one. A slightly bigger bed, a new crop, or a second sowing.



My sun map

Sketch your space, then note the sun at four times of day.

Spot	8 am	11 am	2 pm	5 pm	Total hours

Full sun is 6 to 8 hours of sun per day. [1]

My bed and pot plan

One square per foot, or per pot. Mark tall crops and planned gaps.

KEY T tall · S salad · R root · H herb · G gap for a later sowing

My crop shortlist

Grow what you really like. [3] Circle three to six.

Crop	We eat it...	Cool / warm	Bed or pot	Sun needed	Pick?

Check each seed packet for season and sun. Cool-season crops go out early; warm-season crops after the last frost. [1]

My sowing calendar

Last spring frost: _____ First autumn frost: _____

[illegible]

KEY I sow indoors · O sow or plant outdoors · H harvest. Copy the timing from each seed packet.

Weekly garden log

A tick is enough. Patterns show up within a few weeks.

Week of	Watered	Rain (in)	Fed (pots)	Weeded	Notes

Beds need one to two inches of water per week; containers need a steady supply without waterlogging. [1][2]

Harvest log

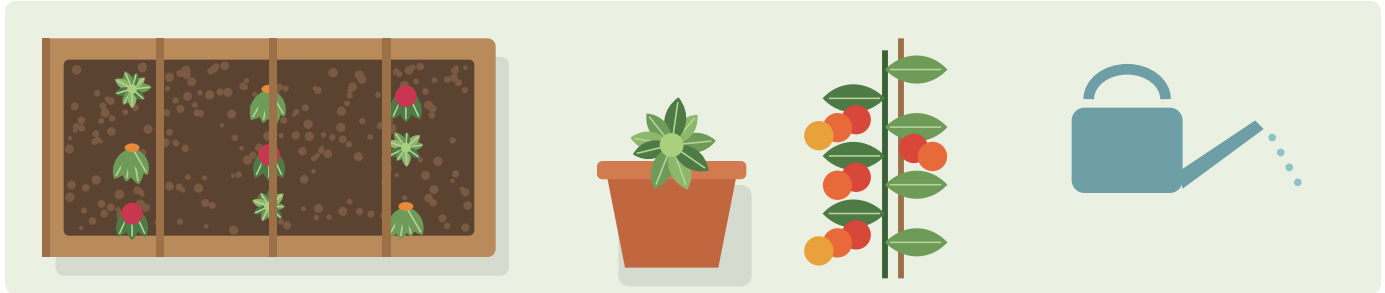
What you picked, when and how much. Your best guide for next year.

Date	Crop	How much	Taste / notes	Grow again?

Wash produce under running water before eating; no soap or detergent. [5]

Your first season, at a glance.

Pin this in the shed or save it to your phone.



- **Start small, grow what you like**

A bed, a plot of about 10 x 10 ft at most, or a few pots. [1][3]

- **Find 6 to 8 hours of sun**

For fruiting crops; leafy crops are more forgiving. [1]

- **Go deep with pots**

At least 45 cm (18 in) where possible, with peat-free potting compost. [2]

- **Plan around frost**

Cool-season early; warm-season after all danger of frost. [1]

- **Water to the soil**

One to two inches a week for beds; steady supply for pots. [1][2]

- **Mulch, feed, protect**

Mulch not touching stems; feed pots every two weeks; fleece for frost. [1][2]

- **Harvest, wash, record**

Running water, no soap. [5] Log it for next year.

The useful fine print

Sources behind the specific statements in this studio sample, and what this edition is and is not.

[1] University of Connecticut Home & Garden Education Center: Vegetable garden basics and plant selections (2020) [Open the source](#)

Full sun equals 6 to 8 hours of sun per day. Start small; 10 ft by 10 ft is manageable to weed, water, plant and harvest. A soil test is recommended. Plant cool-season crops as early as the soil can be worked and warm-season crops after all danger of frost has passed. Vegetables need one to two inches of water per week by rain or hose. Apply mulch around plants, but not touching them, to block light to weed seeds.

[2] Royal Horticultural Society: Vegetables in containers [Open the source](#)

Aim for containers at least 45 cm (18 in) deep and wide, otherwise frequent watering and feeding will be needed. Use peat-free potting compost suited to the purpose. Provide a constant water supply but avoid prolonged waterlogging. A general-purpose liquid feed can be applied every two weeks. If frost is likely, cover plants with horticultural fleece and move pots to a warm, sheltered spot. Suitable crops include beetroot, dwarf French beans, herbs, peas, potatoes, radishes, rocket, salad leaves, salad onions, chillies, peppers and tomatoes.

[3] Royal Horticultural Society: Getting started with vegetables [Open the source](#)

Grow only what you really like, keeping experiments to a minimum. Space will be the greatest limitation on what you can grow. If space is at a premium, consider dwarf selections and bush forms.

[4] USDA Agricultural Research Service: 2023 Plant Hardiness Zone Map [Open the source](#)

The map is based on the average annual extreme minimum winter temperature, shown as 10-degree F zones and 5-degree F half zones. Find your zone by entering a ZIP code or clicking the interactive map. (US only; it describes winter cold, not frost dates.)

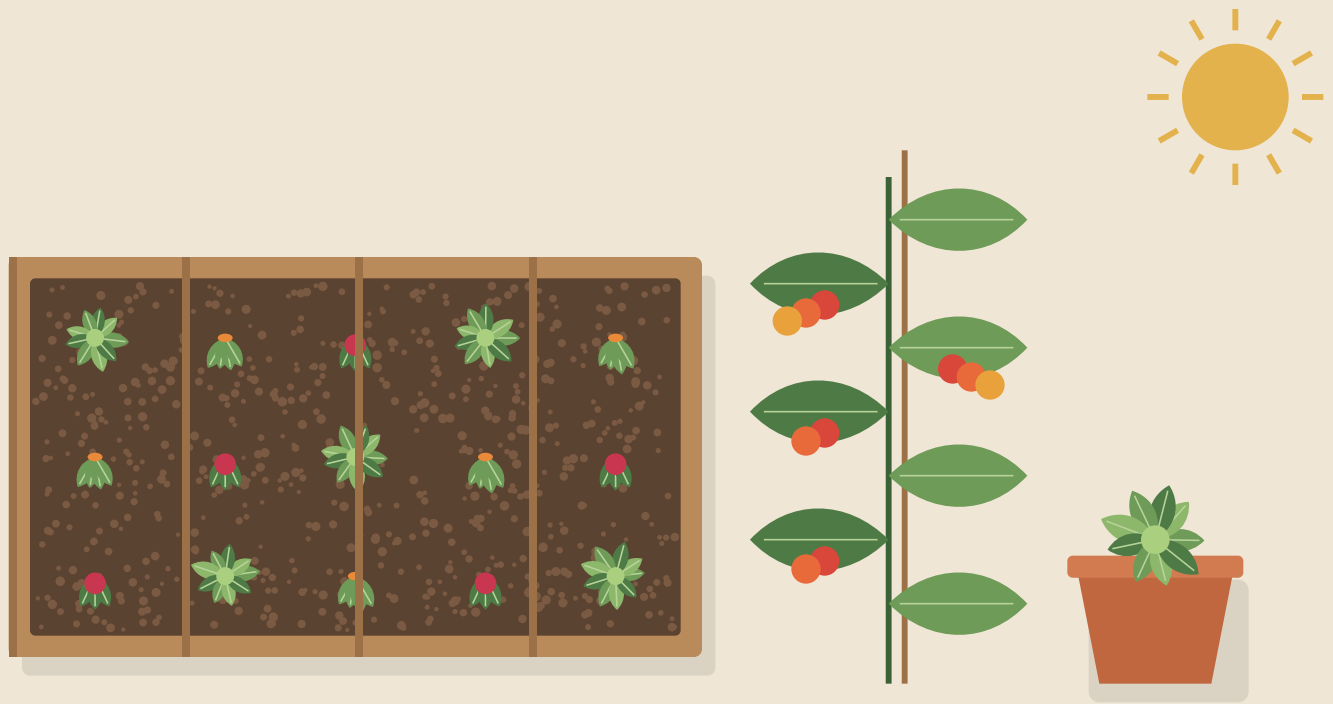
[5] US Food and Drug Administration: Selecting and serving produce safely (updated 5 Mar 2024) [Open the source](#)

Wash all produce thoroughly under running water before preparing or eating. Washing with soap, detergent or commercial produce wash is not recommended. Scrub firm produce with a clean produce brush, then dry with a clean cloth or paper towel.

About this edition

Written, illustrated and designed by Forgewick, operated by Haris Sohail. Studio Edition 1.0, September 2026. All text, illustrations and worksheets are original. General gardening guidance: climates, soils, frost dates and local rules vary, so check seed packets and your local horticultural or extension service.

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THE FIRST HARVEST GARDEN PLANNER

Start small. Grow what you love. Keep notes.

A beginner season plan for beds, balconies and pots,
with six printable worksheets.

FORGEWICK

Original studio edition / forgewick.com/creators/first-harvest-garden-planner