



# Vegetable Gardening

January 21, 2025

# Definitions

- ▶ Organic gardening
  - ▶ Using natural, non-synthetic chemical methods to fertilize, manage pests, diseases and weeds.
- ▶ Conventional gardening
  - ▶ Relies on chemical intervention to control pests, diseases and weeds and provide plant nutrition.
- ▶ Sustainable agriculture
  - ▶ Practicing good stewardship in limiting inputs from outside sources and considering health of the complete system.
- ▶ Regenerative agriculture
  - ▶ Food production practices that focus on rebuilding soil health and conserving water and other resources.

# Why is organic important?

- ▶ Promote the health of the entire system.
- ▶ Protect and improve the health of your soil, plants, and the wildlife that depend on the plants.
- ▶ Promote environmental stewardship.
- ▶ Effective and inexpensive.
- ▶ Any step toward organic is a move in a positive direction.
- ▶ Ultimately produce a better result.

# What will we cover?

- ▶ Growing healthy plants
- ▶ Choosing a garden space
- ▶ Making a plan
- ▶ Extending the harvest
- ▶ Managing pests





Growing Healthy Plants

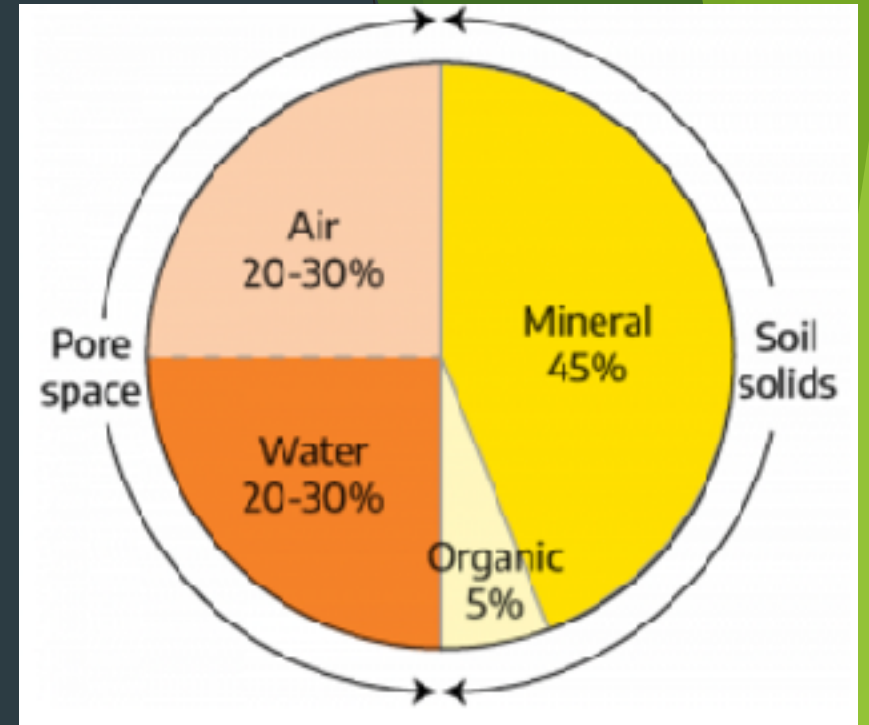
# What do plants need to thrive?

- ▶ Healthy, well-drained soil
- ▶ Proper nutrients
- ▶ Sufficient light
- ▶ Sufficient moisture
- ▶ Proper timing
- ▶ Proper spacing



# What is healthy soil?

- ▶ Mineral matter, organic matter, air, water, and living organisms
- ▶ Ideal vegetable garden soil
  - ▶ Deep, well-drained
  - ▶ High in organic matter
  - ▶ Has good structure



# Why healthy soil matters

- ▶ Soil ecology is very complex and activity below ground impacts plant health.
- ▶ Think of healthy soil as a bank account.
- ▶ Feed the soil and let the soil feed the plants.
  - ▶ Compost
  - ▶ Cover crops
  - ▶ Mulch
  - ▶ No till or low till





# Proper nutrients

- ▶ Plants need 16 elements for normal growth
  - ▶ Air: carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen
  - ▶ Soil: P, K, Mg, Ca, S, Fe, C, Mn, Zn, B, Cl, Mo
- ▶ pH
- ▶ Soil test



# Virginia Cooperative Extension

## Soil Test Report

**Questions? Contact:**  
 Powhatan County Office  
 3910 Old Buckingham Rd.  
 Suite B  
 Powhatan, VA 23139  
 804-598-5640

Virginia Tech Soil Testing Laboratory  
 145 Smyth Hall (0465)  
 185 Ag Quad Ln  
 Blacksburg, VA 24061  
 www.soiltest.vt.edu

SEE NOTES:  
**1 19**  
 at [www.soiltest.vt.edu](http://www.soiltest.vt.edu) under Report Notes

O W N E R	<b>MCINTOSH KATRINA</b>	C F O R Y
	<b>4185 OLD PLANTATION RD</b>	
	<b>POWHATAN, VA 23139</b>	

### SAMPLE HISTORY

Sample ID	Field ID	LAST CROP		LAST LIME APPLICATION		SOIL INFORMATION				
		Name	Yield	Months Prev.	Tons/Acre	SMU-1 %	SMU-2 %	SMU-3 %	Yield Estimate	Productivity Group
<b>MVEG</b>				<b>13-18</b>	<b>1-5 1b/100</b>					

### LAB TEST RESULTS (see Note 1)

Analysis	P (lb/A)	K (lb/A)	Ca (lb/A)	Mg (lb/A)	Zn (ppm)	Mn (ppm)	Cu (ppm)	Fe (ppm)	B (ppm)	S.Salts (ppm)
<b>Result</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>3107</b>	<b>321</b>	<b>8.2</b>	<b>20.5</b>	<b>1.9</b>	<b>18.3</b>	<b>0.5</b>	
<b>Rating</b>	<b>VH</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>VH</b>	<b>VH</b>	<b>SUFF</b>	<b>SUFF</b>	<b>SUFF</b>	<b>SUFF</b>	<b>SUFF</b>	

Analysis	Soil pH	Buffer Index	Est.-CEC (meq/100g)	Acidity (%)	Base Sat. (%)	Ca Sat. (%)	Mg Sat. (%)	K Sat. (%)	Organic Matter (%)
<b>Result</b>	<b>6.3</b>	<b>6.24</b>	<b>10.2</b>	<b>9.3</b>	<b>90.7</b>	<b>76.2</b>	<b>13.0</b>	<b>1.4</b>	<b>6.0</b>

### FERTILIZER AND LIMESTONE RECOMMENDATIONS

Crop: VEGETABLE GARDEN (210)

**608. LIME RECOMMENDATIONS:** Apply 5 pounds of agricultural limestone (ground or pulverized) per 100 square feet.

**991. "Explanation of Soil Tests, Note 1" and other referenced notes are viewable at [www.soiltest.vt.edu](http://www.soiltest.vt.edu) under Report Notes.**

**225. FERTILIZER RECOMMENDATIONS:** Apply a nitrogen-only fertilizer, such as one of the following amounts per 100 sq. ft. --- 1.25 lbs (2 cups) of nitrate of soda (16-0-0) or 1.33 lbs (2 2/3 cups) of calcium nitrate (15-0-0) or 1.0 lb (2 1/2 cups) of ammonium sulfate (21-0-0) or 0.4 lbs (1 cup) of urea (46-0-0). Do not over fertilize! These products will burn plants at high rates! If you are unable to find one of these fertilizers, apply a turf-type (lawn maintenance) fertilizer that is high in nitrogen with little or no phosphorus and potassium at a rate close to 0.2 lb of nitrogen per 100 sq. ft., such as applying two-thirds of a pound of either 26-0-2 or 32-0-4. For additional information on fertilization, see Note 19.

# Sufficient light

- ▶ 6-8 hours direct sunlight for most edibles, 8-10 for heavy fruiting plants
- ▶ Leafy greens can grow in more shade



# Sufficient moisture

- ▶ More plants die from overwatering rather than under watering.
- ▶ 1 inch per week =  $\sim 2/3$  gal/sq ft
- ▶ Mulch is the best way to control moisture.
- ▶ Water deeply yet infrequently
  - ▶ Roots will go where the water is
  - ▶ Seedlings are an exception
- ▶ When in doubt, do the finger test



# Overhead vs. surface watering

- ▶ Provide water low to the ground and delivered at a slow rate (reduces runoff and erosion)
  - ▶ Watering overhead sprays the foliage and doesn't provide even water distribution.
  - ▶ Wet foliage increases vulnerability to disease
  - ▶ Broadcasting water increases the water evaporation rates, decreasing what the plant uses.
- ▶ Drip irrigation and soaker hoses on programmable timers



# Timing

- ▶ There is no single best time of year to plant everything.
- ▶ Plant what is appropriate for the season
- ▶ Use succession planting to extend the season
- ▶ If desired, season extension structures can be used
  - ▶ Cold frames
  - ▶ Row covers
  - ▶ Greenhouses



# Timing - what you need to know

- ▶ Your hardiness zone
- ▶ Know your average last and first frost dates
- ▶ Days to maturity
- ▶ Type of crop

*Use seed catalogs, seed packets and plant tags as a resource for growing information*



# USDA Plant Hardiness Zone

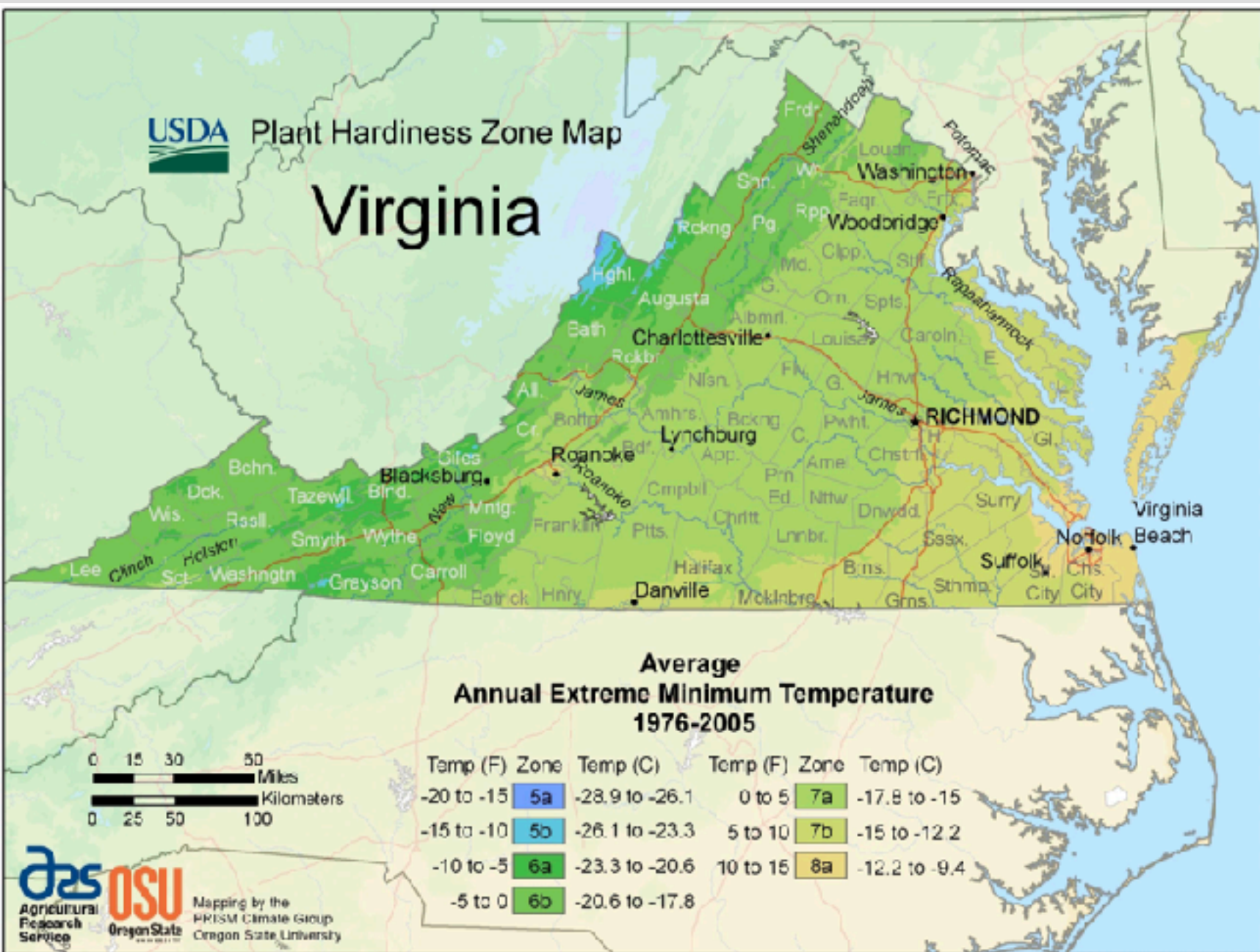
- ▶ Impacts the length of the growing season
- ▶ Based on average minimum winter temperatures over 30 yrs
- ▶ Virginia: Zones 5, 6, 7, and 8
- ▶ Goochland/Powhatan: Zone 7a
  - ▶ Average minimum winter temperature 0 - 10° F
  - ▶ Average 61 to 90 days above 86° F
  - ▶ Average last Spring frost Apr 15 - 25
  - ▶ Average first Fall frost Oct 15 - 25







# Virginia

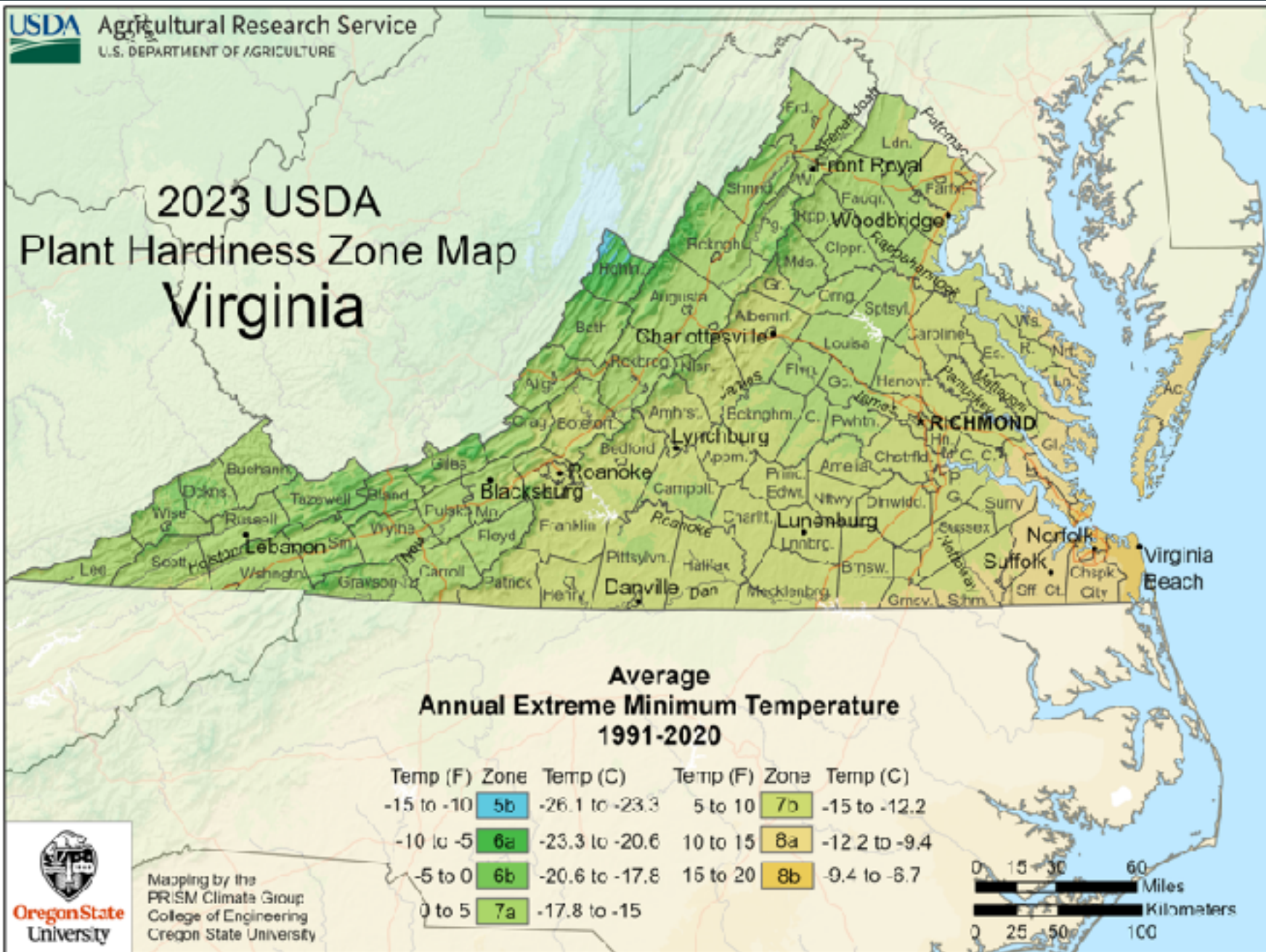


**Average Annual Extreme Minimum Temperature 1976-2005**

0 15 30 50 Miles  
 0 25 50 100 Kilometers

Temp (F)	Zone	Temp (C)	Temp (F)	Zone	Temp (C)
-20 to -15	5a	-28.9 to -26.1	0 to 5	7a	-17.8 to -15
-15 to -10	5b	-26.1 to -23.3	5 to 10	7b	-15 to -12.2
-10 to -5	6a	-23.3 to -20.6	10 to 15	8a	-12.2 to -9.4
-5 to 0	6b	-20.6 to -17.8			

# 2023 USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map Virginia



**Average  
Annual Extreme Minimum Temperature  
1991-2020**

Temp (F)	Zone	Temp (C)	Temp (F)	Zone	Temp (C)
-15 to -10	5b	-26.1 to -23.3	5 to 10	7b	-15 to -12.2
-10 to -5	6a	-23.3 to -20.6	10 to 15	8a	-12.2 to -9.4
-5 to 0	6b	-20.6 to -17.8	15 to 20	8b	-9.4 to -6.7
0 to 5	7a	-17.8 to -15			



# Timing - maturity rate

- ▶ The time span it takes to grow to produce edible fruit.
- ▶ For example:
  - ▶ Tomatoes 45 days after transplant, some 70 days
  - ▶ Radish will “fruit” and can be harvested just 30 days after germination
  - ▶ Cantaloupe can take 80 days or more before harvest
- ▶ Use maturity date to extend your season
  - ▶ Succession planting
  - ▶ Grow different varieties with different maturity dates

# Maturity rate

- ▶ Understand planting limitations
  - ▶ Use maturity rate and last frost date to calculate
  - ▶ Plan for your plant to mature before frost comes.
- ▶ Example:
  - ▶ First fall frost date = October 15
  - ▶ Tomato plant = 60 days to maturity
  - ▶ Avg harvest period = 6-8 weeks
  - ▶ That plant must be growing by Jul 15
- ▶ Better option is to allow a cushion of time and plant by Jul 1



# Timing: cool vs. warm season crops

- ▶ Preferred growing season.
- ▶ Plant hardiness and frost tolerance.
- ▶ Three- season or year-round food production.



# Cool season crops

- ▶ Lettuce
- ▶ Cabbage
- ▶ Spinach
- ▶ Brussels sprouts
- ▶ Kale
- ▶ Collards
- ▶ Mustard
- ▶ Potatoes
- ▶ Arugula
- ▶ Broccoli
- ▶ Cauliflower
- ▶ Beets
- ▶ Onions
- ▶ Carrots
- ▶ Peas
- ▶ Swiss chard



# Warm season crops

- ▶ Corn
- ▶ Cucumbers
- ▶ Cantaloupe
- ▶ Eggplant
- ▶ Southern peas
- ▶ Okra
- ▶ Peppers
- ▶ Winter and summer squash
- ▶ Sweet potatoes
- ▶ Tomatoes
- ▶ Melons
- ▶ Beans







# Resources

- ▶ <https://ext.vt.edu/lawn-garden/home-vegetables.html>
- ▶ <https://www.johnnyseeds.com/growers-library/seed-planting-schedule-calculator.html>




## VEGETABLES TO PLANT IN MARCH

	ZONE 6A	ZONE 6B	ZONE 7A	ZONE 7B	ZONE 8A
Direct sow	Collards, kale Mustard Onion (bulbing) Peas, Garden Radish Spinach	Asparagus Beets Cauliflower Chard/Swiss Celeriac, Kale Kohlrabi Mustard Peas, Garden Potatoes Radish Spinach Turnips	Asparagus Beets Cauliflower Chard/Swiss Celeriac, Kale Kohlrabi Mustard Peas, Garden Potatoes Radish Spinach Turnips	Asparagus Beets Cauliflower Chard/Swiss Collards, Kale Kohlrabi Mustard Peas, Garden Potatoes Spinach Turnips	Asparagus Beets Cauliflower Chard/Swiss Celeriac, Kale Kohlrabi Mustard Peas, Garden Potatoes Radish Spinach Turnips
Transplant		broccoli* cabbage* cucurbit* lettuce, head*	broccoli* cabbage* cucurbit* kale* lettuce, head*	broccoli* cabbage* cucurbit* lettuce, head*	broccoli* cabbage* cucurbit* lettuce, head* (tomatoes* start of March)

**More info: [pubs.ext.vt.edu](http://pubs.ext.vt.edu)**

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Check our publication for exact planting dates!

\* = transplant  
Do not harvest asparagus in first year.  
For a full list & more info see our publication "Virginia Home Garden Vegetable Planting Guide"

This is not the official USDA Hardiness Zone Map. To find your exact zone, visit [planwatch.usda.gov](http://planwatch.usda.gov)

# Spacing

- ▶ Light exposure and air circulation
  - ▶ High humidity areas
  - ▶ Challenging
- ▶ Read the tags and seed packets
- ▶ Sowing seed
  - ▶ Germination rates
  - ▶ Sow 2-3 seeds to ensure higher success rate
  - ▶ “Thinning” - necessary tough love



# Depth of planting seeds

- ▶ Seed packets indicate proper depth.
- ▶ Why this is important
  - ▶ Some seeds need sunlight to germinate
  - ▶ Some require only a light covering to keep moisture level
  - ▶ Some require more time and deeper sowing
  - ▶ Typically correlates to seed size
    - ▶ Sow 2-3 times seed width



# Depth of planting seedlings

- ▶ Look at the plant tag
- ▶ Rule of thumb - plant at the depth the plant is in the container
- ▶ Exception: tomatoes





## Choosing a Garden Space

# Orientation and layout

- ▶ Light requirements
- ▶ Proximity to water, tools, structures, & the back door
- ▶ Common water requirements
  - ▶ Drainage
  - ▶ Place plants with similar water needs together
- ▶ Mature plant size
  - ▶ Put taller plants on north or west side



# No-till beds

- ▶ Mounded soil or a bed of soil raised above its surrounding
- ▶ Creates a deep and wide growing area for plant roots
- ▶ Provides control over health of soil and drainage
- ▶ Less soil disturbance = fewer weeds
- ▶ Easy to start & maintain



# No-till beds

- ▶ Consider one-time till for compacted soil
- ▶ Mow area very short or solarize for aggressive weed control
- ▶ Cover with cardboard or newspaper
- ▶ Add 3-4 inches compost
- ▶ Top with 6-8 inches of mulch (wood chips, straw, leaves)
- ▶ Cover crop
- ▶ Optimal in fall
- ▶ Soil test before planting





# Raised beds

- ▶ Control soil inputs
  - ▶ Intensive planting
  - ▶ Better disease resistance
- ▶ Creates a deep and wide growing area for plant roots
- ▶ Moisture level may be difficult to control
- ▶ Can be expensive



# Raised beds - structure

- ▶ Wood
  - ▶ treated vs. untreated
- ▶ Composite wood
- ▶ Metal
  - ▶ Coated
- ▶ Cinderblocks, railroad ties, tires (not recommended)



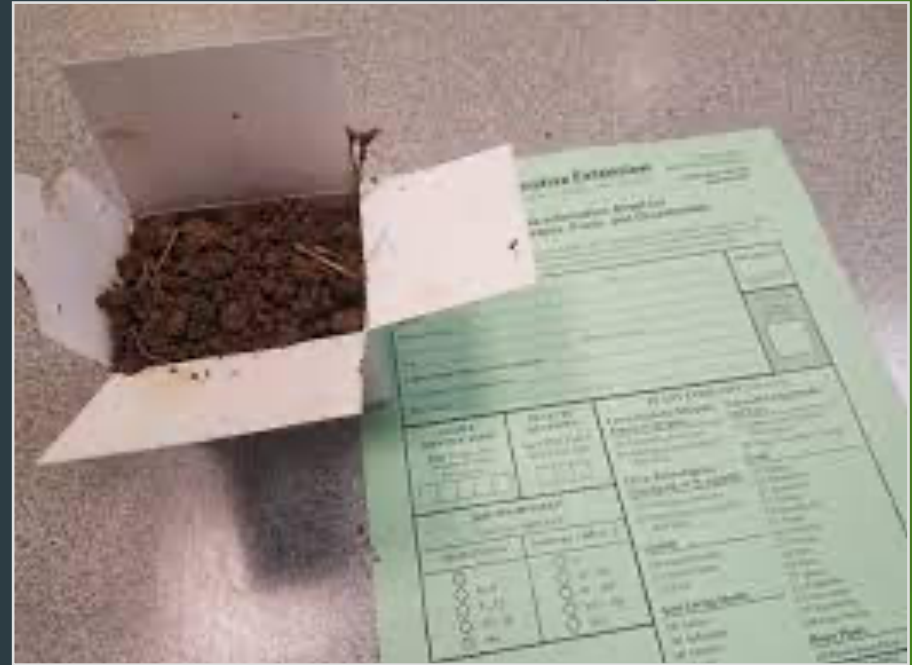
# Raised beds -dimensions

- ▶ 12-18” high most comfortable
- ▶ 3-4’ wide
- ▶ Length is whatever is convenient to you and your space
- ▶ Accessibility recommendations
  - ▶ 30” high
  - ▶ 22” wide
  - ▶ 12” deep



# Perfect soil recipe

- ▶ No fill dirt!
- ▶ 50% high quality top soil
- ▶ 30% compost
- ▶ 20% combination of:
  - ▶ Shredded, aged leaves
  - ▶ Composted cow or chicken manure
  - ▶ Mineralized soil blend
  - ▶ Worm castings (vermicompost)
  - ▶ Mushroom compost
  - ▶ Ground bark



***Get a soil test  
before planting!***

# Container gardening

- ▶ Choosing containers
  - ▶ Large enough for plants
  - ▶ Holds soil without tipping or spilling
  - ▶ Adequate drainage
  - ▶ Have never held toxic products
  - ▶ Clay, plastic, metal, wood, fabric



# Container gardening media

- ▶ Lightweight potting mix
  - ▶ Porous for air and water movement
  - ▶ Do not use soilless mix (too light)
- ▶ Choose high quality



# Container gardening

- ▶ Choose plant varieties carefully
  - ▶ Highly productive
  - ▶ Dwarf varieties
- ▶ Space for support structures
- ▶ Do not add rocks for drainage
- ▶ Change the soil every 1-2 years



# Other methods



<https://hgic.clemson.edu/factsheet/straw-bale-gardening/>



[www.permaculture.co.uk/articles/the-many-benefits-of-hugelkultur/](http://www.permaculture.co.uk/articles/the-many-benefits-of-hugelkultur/)



<https://gardenseason.com/hydroponic-tower/>

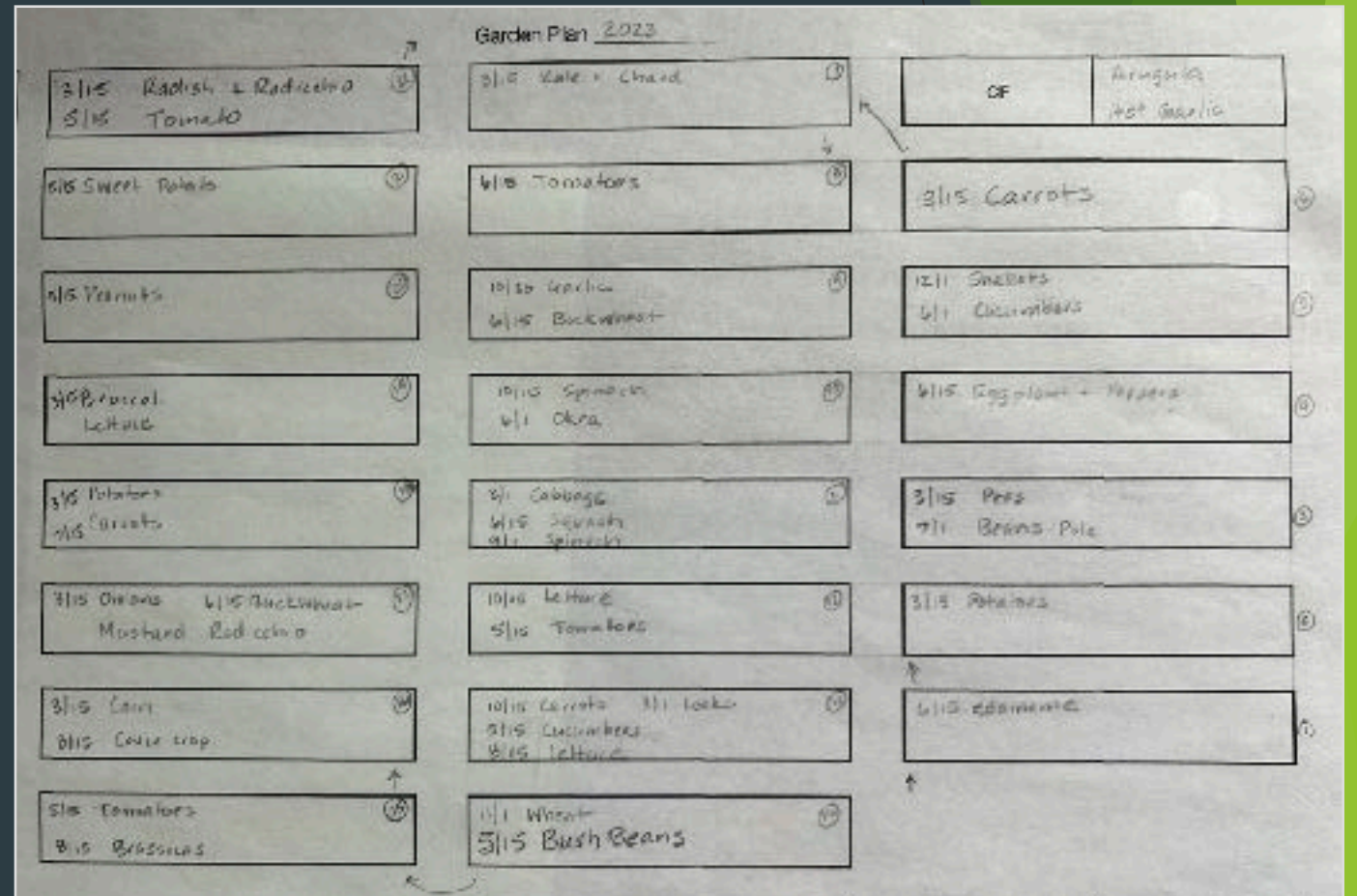




## Planning Your Garden

# Have a plan!

- ▶ Plan your garden space for fullest potential
- ▶ Record keeping
- ▶ Proper timing
- ▶ Crop rotation
- ▶ Season extension



# Where to begin?

- ▶ What do you eat?
- ▶ How much time are you willing to invest?
- ▶ How much space do you have?
- ▶ Economic value per sq ft



# What grows here?

- ▶ Tomatoes
- ▶ Peppers
- ▶ Eggplant
- ▶ Herbs
- ▶ Lettuce
- ▶ Leafy greens
- ▶ Potatoes
- ▶ Sweet potatoes
- ▶ Winter and summer squash
- ▶ Cucumbers
- ▶ Asparagus
- ▶ Okra
- ▶ Corn
- ▶ Garlic
- ▶ Onions, leeks, shallots
- ▶ Peas
- ▶ Beans
- ▶ Edamame
- ▶ Beets
- ▶ Carrots and parsnips
- ▶ Turnips
- ▶ Radishes
- ▶ Asparagus
- ▶ Artichokes
- ▶ Peanuts

*Don't forget fruit!*



# Starting with transplants

- ▶ Extend growing season
- ▶ Available at any garden center.
- ▶ Avoid plants with damage, pests and discolored leaves.
- ▶ Organic vs conventional
- ▶ Just because it's available for purchase doesn't mean you should plant it!



# Transplanting (warm season)

- ▶ Plant or transplant outside after all risk of frost has passed
- ▶ Start seeds indoors ~8 weeks before the last projected frost date of your area.
- ▶ Harden off before planting out.
- ▶ Transplant out on a shady day or in the afternoon.



# Starting from seeds

- ▶ Cost saving
- ▶ Increased selection
- ▶ Better established plant
- ▶ Reputable seed companies
  - ▶ Johnny's, Southern Exposure Seed Exchange, Seed Savers Exchange, Territorial Seeds, High Mowing Seeds, Pinetree



# Choosing varieties

- ▶ Bush and vining types
- ▶ Hybrid and Open-pollinated (Heirloom)
- ▶ Indeterminate and determinate





# Crop rotation

- ▶ Mixing up plant placement each year (plant families).
- ▶ Plants interact with soil differently, and each is susceptible to different pests and diseases.
- ▶ Through crop rotation, you can create a better soil balance and reduce pests and disease issues.
- ▶ 3 year minimum rotation

# Garden Plan 2024

3/15 Lettuce (2)  
5/15 Eggplant  
10/1 Crimson Clover

1/1 Kale (1)  
3/15 Carrots  
7/1 Beans or Peas

CF	Lettuce
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1/1 Crimson Clover (2)  
6/1 Sweet Potato

Scribble  
Runner

3/15 Kale (8)

Spinach

1/1 Shallots (6)  
7/1 Buckwheat  
9/1 Chard

3/15 Cabbage (20)  
7/15 Zucchini

1/1 Collards + Mustard (9)  
5/15 Tomato

1/1 Date + Vetch (5)  
5/15 Peppers + Tomatillos  
Dill

3/15 Potatoes (10)  
7/15 Carrots

1/1 Garlic (10)  
7/1 Buckwheat

Lettuce

3/15 Peas (4)  
6/15 Beans Green Onions

3/15 Onions (18)  
7/15 Broccoli

1/1 Spinach (10)  
6/1 Peanuts or Corn?

3/15 Potatoes New Zealand (3)  
8/15 Kohlrabi + Chard Spinach

3/1 Radish (17)  
5/1 Corn 10/1 Rye

Milk

3/15 Broccoli (2)  
6/15 Squash

Milk

3/15 Kohlrabi + Beets (2)  
5/15 Okra

1/1 Rye (16)  
5/1 Tomato

1/1 Lettuce (13)  
5/15 Tomato

3/15 Radicchio + Raab (1)  
6/1 Edamame + Lima Bean

5/15 Bush Beans (5)

3/1 Leeks (14)  
5/15 Cucumbers

↑  
Yarrow, Alyssum, Dill, Zinnia  
Bachelors Buttons, Marigold, Parsley

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1/1 Lettuce (13)  
5/15 Tomato

3/15 Radicchio + Raab (1)  
6/1 Edamame + Lima Bean

5/15 Bush Beans (5)

3/1 Leeks (14)  
5/15 Cucumbers

Yarrow, Alyssum, Dill, Zinnia  
Bachelors Buttons, Marigold, Parsley



## Extending the harvest

Methods and structures

# Frost protection

- ▶ 32° F
- ▶ Warm season crops need protection for season extension.
- ▶ Cool weather crops can handle frost, and may improve flavor.
- ▶ Winter garden



# Floating row cover

- ▶ Lightweight spun or woven fabric
- ▶ Benefits:
  - ▶ Allows rain and sun to pass through
  - ▶ Keeps insects out
  - ▶ Reduces wind damage
  - ▶ Increases temp underneath by 10°F
- ▶ Cover at night, uncover during the day
- ▶ Different thicknesses for different uses
  - ▶ Frost protection for earlier and later harvests
- ▶ Remove after flowering begins for pollination
  - ▶ Early morning best time



# Cold frame

- ▶ Simple structures - wood, straw bales, reused windows
- ▶ Capture the sun's heat
- ▶ Protect from wind chill
- ▶ Harden off seedlings
- ▶ Great for growing lettuce over winter (vent on warm days)



# Mini-greenhouse/low tunnel

- ▶ Hoop structure
- ▶ Cover with greenhouse plastic or plastic sheeting
- ▶ Warms soil for earlier spring planting
- ▶ Wind and frost protection
- ▶ Easy to make
- ▶ Moveable





# High tunnel / hoophouse

- ▶ Unheated
- ▶ Can be combined with other techniques for more cold protection
- ▶ Zone 7 winter day length benefit
- ▶ Must be vented during warm days
- ▶ Open for pollinators



# Greenhouses

- ▶ Highest cost
- ▶ Trap and hold as much daytime heat as possible
- ▶ Heat management in summer
- ▶ Supplemental heat in winter
  - ▶ Overwinter exotic plants
  - ▶ Grow tropical fruits and citrus
- ▶ Important to look for pests





## Managing Pests

# Constant vigilance

- ▶ Healthy plants resist pests.
- ▶ Control pests and weeds while they are young.
- ▶ Your hands are your best tools.
- ▶ Use chemicals as your last resort



# Insect control

- ▶ Not all bugs are bad bugs!
- ▶ Plant lots of flowers and blooming herbs to supply nectar for beneficial insects and insect eating birds.
- ▶ Use floating row covers.



# Weeds, weeds, weeds

- ▶ Use no-till practices
- ▶ Disturb soil as little as possible
- ▶ Use mulch and cover crops
- ▶ Pull weeds when they are young
- ▶ Don't let weeds go to seed



# Dealing with disease

- ▶ Inevitable but manageable
- ▶ Choose varieties of plants with disease resistance.
- ▶ Mulch to keep soil-borne diseases under control.
- ▶ Remove and discard diseased leaves and fruit.
- ▶ Clean up fallen fruit.



# Putting the garden to bed

- ▶ Remove remaining weeds and fallen fruit.
- ▶ Remove spent annuals.
- ▶ Don't leave exposed soil - mulch or cover crop.
- ▶ Spring garden season begins in the fall.





# Resources

- ▶ <https://ext.vt.edu/lawn-garden/home-vegetables.html>, Virginia Cooperative Extension website
- ▶ <https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-336/426-336.html> Vegetables Gardening in Containers, Virginia Cooperative Extension website
- ▶ Johnny's Seeds website
- ▶ Southern Exposure Seed Exchange website
- ▶ Books
  - ▶ *Grow Great Vegetables Virginia* by Ira Wallace
  - ▶ *Epic Tomatoes* by Craig LeHoullier
  - ▶ *The Vegetable Gardening Book* by Joe Lamp'l
  - ▶ *Weedless Gardening* by Lee Reich





Thank You!