

## Warm Weather Vegetables

By Earl Hockin

April is the month for moving from cool season to warm weather gardening. Once the last frost date has occurred, which is likely between April 20<sup>th</sup> and May 2<sup>nd</sup>, you can begin planting most annuals and many herbs and vegetables such as melons, okra, eggplant, southern peas, pumpkins, and sweet potatoes. Don't plant basil until you are sure there will be no frost, as it is very sensitive to temperatures below 40F. If your plants have been growing inside or in a greenhouse, be sure that they are hardened off, or acclimated to outdoor weather. Place the plants outdoors during the day in a shady spot, then take them in at night to an unheated spot. Gradually, over a period of several days, move them into spots where they receive more sun and wind. After a few days more, leave them out overnight.

If the soil where you will be planting is dry, water it the night before planting. If it has rained abundantly, test the soil to ensure it is not too wet. Form a ball of soil in your hand and squeeze it. If it crumbles and falls apart it is fine to plant. Otherwise wait a few days. Plant on an overcast day or in the early evening.

After any chance of frost has passed, sow seeds of basil, caraway, dill, hyssop, marjoram, thyme, and fennel where you want them to grow. Parsley seeds need to be soaked in water 24 to 36 hrs. before planting.

During the first weeks of April, you can continue sowing seeds or setting out plants of cabbage, spinach, broccoli, peas, potatoes, onions, radishes, and leaf lettuce.

The University of Tennessee has for the last few years been recruiting home gardeners to carry out tests of different cultivars of vegetables. The home gardeners come from many different counties throughout Tennessee. The counties of Northeast Tennessee are very well represented. Thus, the cultivars that score highly from this research are ones that are good producers, tasty and resistant to a variety of diseases. Some varieties that scored particularly high during the Home Garden Trials include:

- Basil Obsession, a compact, disease resistant plant
- Mascotte bush bean - a compact variety that can be grown in containers
- Seychelles pole bean - an early producer, productive with a long harvest window
- Cucumbers
  - Saladmore - compact and good for slicing and pickling
  - Spacemaster – traditional in flavor and appearance
  - Diva - a seedless, thin-skinned variety that requires no pollination
  - Green light - that is small (3-6 inches long), tasty, productive and requires no pollination
- Okra
  - Candle Fire - red, round pod, good production, long harvest
  - Clemson Spineless - common southern choice
  - Jambalaya - uniform pods, good yield, early to harvest
- Green zucchini
  - Desert - disease resistant, good producer
  - Raven – good producer
  - Green tiger - disease resistant, novel color (striped), good flavor and production
- Summer squash
  - Multipik - straight neck, productive, long harvest period

- Tempest – attractive yellow and white stripes, good taste
- Zephyr – good yield, vigorous grower, distinctive look with straight neck and green end

You can read the full report at: <https://extension.tennessee.edu/publications/Documents/W657.pdf>

The link below will take you to a table that shows all the varieties that were tested between 2015 and 2021. On the list you will see many other varieties, some of which were given All American Selections (AAS) awards, and thus would also be excellent choices. Many others listed are also worthy of trying.

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1oPgY\\_NDAvMzQigLFr69IxRZRTz20EwrX/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1oPgY_NDAvMzQigLFr69IxRZRTz20EwrX/view?usp=sharing)

### **How do I ask a question?**

If you have a question for the Master Gardeners, submit them to us on our website at [www.netmga.net](http://www.netmga.net). Click the link at the top of the page, “ASK A MASTER GARDENER” to send in your question. Questions that are not answered in this column will receive a response from a Master Gardener to the contact information you provide.