

“As early in the spring as possible,” is when you can plant many crops. These are the frost hardy vegetables, like lettuce, carrots, beets, radishes, swiss chard, parsley, peas and onions. This instruction misled me into planting too early. Just because you can doesn't mean you should. I have reason to be wary. Even these seeds can rot in cold soil. If they do germinate, it is slowly. This gives the spring weeds a chance to spread in the rows, making weeding a problem. I've chosen to wait until the optimum time, and not get in a hurry.

The reason to plant early is to get a head start with the cool-loving crops. A late planting of peas may ripen when it is too warm for their liking. But an early April sowing will often catch up to peas planted a month earlier. They jump out of a warmer, looser soil that's been prepared when it's drier.

We have hoed out our onion crops twice already, but have yet to plant any seeds here. I must admit to getting anxious, but instead we are spreading compost and chisel plowing the fields. Thorough tilling and fertilizing pays off. Fifty loads of compost has been mixed into 1 ¼ acres, and 1400 pounds of potatoes need cutting, we have our work cut out for us.

The soil still feels cold to me. So instead of planting the potatoes already, we are getting more ground ready by chisel plowing in our compost for the other spring crops. When April rolls around, the ground will warm and our seeds will sprout quicker.

Another advantage to waiting is that it allows me time to let weeds germinate and then I can exterminate them. Any mechanical weeding is much appreciated. Let the weeds sprout and I'll plant after they are dealt with by the plows and harrows.

I used to sow carrots and parsley in mid-March. It took three weeks for them to come up and be big enough to hoe. That's three weeks of chickweed, dead nettle and other spring weeds growing. Thus, our first hoeing required a lot of bending over.

A mid-April planting of carrots or parsley is up in a week. We can rake the soil away from the tiny plants without having to bend down and pull up weeds that are already well-rooted. A week old weed is much weaker, and falls to the hoe.

The cool rain will soak into our composted fields, to be used by our crops next summer. Slowly spring comes, and we'll, be ready when the ground is. I'm learning patience, to wait for the perfect time. I just can't commit my seed to the mother's fertile womb, yet.