



How to Harden Off Vegetable Seedlings, and Why It Is So Important

Congratulations! You are now the “proud parents” of some baby vegetable seedlings that will bring you much edible pleasure for the coming months. These seedlings have been nurtured in a greenhouse, and like all young things, they need to get used to life in the great outdoors.

About 5-7 days ahead of your planting-out date:

1. On the first day, place your seedlings outside for a few hours in a protected spot and move them inside at night.
2. For the next 5-6 days, gradually lengthening these outdoor periods before planting-out. This will get them used to the strong daytime sunlight and cool spring nights of their new home outside.

Two General hardened-off Rules:

- **Warm-season vegetable** seedlings like tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, eggplants, squash, and pumpkins can be planted out in the garden when nighttime temperatures stay above 60° F, or in late May-Early June.
- **Cold-season vegetable** seedlings like onions, cabbages, cauliflower, broccoli, brussels sprouts, and greens can handle nighttime temperatures in the 40s (from mid-May).

For more detailed information, go to: [UMass Vegetable Fact Sheets](#)

