



When can we start to plant on Cape Cod?

When we finally have a glimmer of spring, those living on the Cape want to get out in their yards and gardens and put plants in the ground. This urge is especially strong on warm, sunny days, be they in March or May. Yet some plants may not do well if placed into the soil too early. Here are guidelines for your spring planting.

- **Shrubs and Trees:** These can be planted as early as March as long as the ground isn't frozen. Depending on the weather, shrubs and trees start to come into our nursery around the third or fourth week in March. Note that plants that are slower to break dormancy, or have more tender leaves, don't arrive until later in April or even into May. Examples of plants that are later to arrive are Hydrangeas and ornamental grasses.
- **Perennials:** Plants that die back to the ground in winter can be placed in your gardens from April on. Usually, once they are displayed outside in the garden center, they are hardened off and are ready to plant. Cold-tolerant perennials arrive in our garden center first. Perennials that break dormancy later (hardy Hibiscus!) are available in early summer.
- **Annuals:** Some cold tolerant annuals such as pansies arrive in March or early April, depending on the weather. Once you see these on display outside, you'll know it's safe to put them in your garden. Summer annuals usually need warmer temperatures before planting. Wait to fill your gardens, window boxes and containers until the night-time temperatures are reliably above 50°. On Cape Cod, the night temperatures are a better indication of when it's safe to plant than a "last frost date." We seldom have a frost in May, but cold nights can damage or stunt tender plants even if there is no frost.
- **Vegetables:** Cold-tolerant veggies such as lettuce, peas, broccoli and kale can be planted in early to late April, depending on the weather. Putting seeds in the ground in March has no advantage on the Cape because seeds planted in cold soil take longer to germinate. Warm weather plants such as eggplant, peppers, squash and tomatoes can be planted outside when night temperatures are reliably above 50°. This usually happens in mid-to late May. Planting early in cold soil can stunt plants. On Cape we can put veggie plants in the garden through June.
- **Tropicals:** These plants should be put outside after the night-time temperatures are reliably above 50°. If you buy them early, put them out on warm days and bring inside for the night.