

Prince George Seed Library



A community partnership of



DAVID DOUGLAS
BOTANICAL GARDEN SOCIETY



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FLOWERS

Aster (*Symphotrichum* / *Callistephus*)

- **Type:** Hardy Perennial / Annual
- **Ease of Growing:** Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Moderate
- **Specialties:** Essential late-season pollinator food (blooms until frost).

Plant Profile: Asters provide a critical burst of purple, blue, and white in August and September when other flowers are fading. They are tough, drought-tolerant once established, and beloved by bees preparing for winter.

Timing: Start seeds indoors in **late March** or direct sow in **mid-May**.

Starting: Sow **3mm deep**. They need light to germinate, so don't bury them too deep.

Growing: Full sun. Space plants **30–45cm** apart. They prefer well-drained soil and benefit from "pinching" (cutting the top 2 inches off) in June to encourage a bushier shape with more flowers.

Seed Saving: Wait for the flower heads to turn into small, fluffy tan "puffballs." Snip the heads and rub them to release the seeds.

Culinary/Garden Uses:

- **Cut Flowers:** Excellent vase life; standard in late-summer bouquets.
- **Pollinators:** Attracts beneficial hoverflies and late-season butterflies.

Bidens (*Bidens ferulifolia*)

- **Type:** Annual (often acts as a tender perennial in warmer zones)
- **Ease of Growing:** Very Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Moderate
- **Specialties:** Drought-tolerant pollinator magnet; thrives in hanging baskets and rock gardens.

Plant Profile: Bidens, also known as "Apache Beggarticks," is a hardy survivor that produces a carpet of starry yellow flowers. It is incredibly resilient to heat and wind, making it a "set it and forget it" favorite for sunny edges and containers.

Timing: Start indoors 6–8 weeks before the last frost, or direct sow in late May once the soil has warmed up.

Starting: Sow seeds 1/8 inch deep in a well-draining starting mix. They require consistent warmth (about 21°C) to germinate, which usually takes 10–14 days.

Growing: Full sun is a must. While they are drought-tolerant once established, they bloom most prolifically with regular watering. Deadhead (remove spent blooms) throughout the summer to keep the plant from focusing entirely on seed production.

Seed Saving: After the yellow petals fall, a green seed head will form and eventually turn dark brown and "prickly." These seeds have small hooks (like Velcro) designed to hitch a ride on fur or clothing. Harvest the brown heads and rub them between your fingers to separate the long, thin black seeds.

Culinary/Garden Uses:

- **Pollinator Support:** One of the best plants for attracting hoverflies, honeybees, and butterflies to the garden.
- **Trailing Beauty:** Its "spilling" habit makes it the perfect golden fringe for the edges of raised beds or window boxes.

Calendula (*Calendula officinalis*)

- **Type:** Hardy Annual
- **Ease of Growing:** Very Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Very Easy
- **Specialties:** Pollinator plant, Edible petals, Medicinal properties

Plant Profile: Often called "Pot Marigold," this is a staple for northern gardens. It is incredibly cold-tolerant, often surviving the first few light frosts of autumn. Its bright orange and yellow blooms are edible and frequently used in skin salves.

Timing: Direct sow as soon as the soil can be worked in spring (late April/early May). For a continuous harvest in our short season, sow a new batch every 3 weeks until July.

Starting: Sow seeds **5mm deep**. If starting indoors to get a head start on the season, do so **4–6 weeks** before the last frost. Keep seeds in darkness until they sprout, then move to a very bright window to prevent legginess.

Growing: Space plants **20–30cm** apart. They are not picky about soil but do require full sun. In Zone 3, watch for powdery mildew in late August; avoid watering the leaves directly.

Seed Saving: Wait for the flower head to drop its petals and turn into a "crown" of curved, brown, bumpy seeds. Once they feel dry and brittle, they will fall off into your hand with a light touch.

Candytuft (*Iberis umbellata*)

- **Type:** Perennial
- **Ease of Growing:** Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Easy
- **Specialties:** Fragrant, Drought-tolerant, Great for rock gardens

Plant Profile: A low-growing, mound-forming plant that smothers itself in clusters of white, pink, or purple blooms. It is an excellent choice for the edges of gravel paths or rocky areas where other plants might struggle with the drainage.

Timing: In Zone 3, start indoors **6–8 weeks** before the last frost to ensure a long bloom period.

Starting: These have sensitive roots. Use peat/coir pots so you can plant the whole pot into the ground. Cover seeds with only **2mm** of soil. Germination is best at temperatures around **21°C**.

Growing: Space **15–30cm** apart in full sun. Once the first flush of flowers fades, shear the plant back by a third to encourage a second bloom before the fall frost.

Seed Saving: Small, flat seed pods form along the stems after flowering. Wait for the pods to turn tan and dry. Snip the stems into a paper bag to catch the seeds as they shatter.

Columbine (*Aquilegia*)

- **Type:** Hardy Perennial
- **Ease of Growing:** Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Very Easy
- **Specialties:** Unique "spurred" flowers; one of the best choices for partial shade.

Plant Profile: Columbines are a spring highlight in the Northern garden. Their delicate, bell-shaped flowers feature long "spurs" that hold nectar for hummingbirds. They are incredibly hardy and will reliably return year after year, often crossing with other varieties in your garden to create brand-new color combinations.

Timing: In Zone 3, these can be direct-sown in late autumn (letting nature handle the cold) or started indoors in February.

Starting: Crucial Step: The seeds need a period of cold to wake up (stratification). If starting indoors, place seeds in a damp paper towel in a bag in the fridge for 3 weeks before planting. Once ready, surface sow—they need light to germinate.

Growing: They prefer "bright shade" or dappled sunlight. Keep the soil moist but not soggy. They are relatively short-lived perennials (3–4 years), but they produce so many seeds that you will always have new "babies" to replace the old ones.

Seed Saving: After the bloom dies, an upright, green pod forms. As it dries, it turns brown and the top opens up like a little cup. When you hear the seeds rattle inside, simply tip the stem into a container. The seeds are shiny, black, and very easy to collect.

Culinary/Garden Uses:

- **Hummingbird Magnet:** The flower shape is evolutionarily designed for long-tongued pollinators.
- **Deer Resistant:** Generally avoided by deer and rabbits, making them great for the edges of wooded properties.

Coreopsis (*Tickseed*)

- **Type:** Hardy Perennial
- **Ease of Growing:** Very Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Easy
- **Specialties:** Long-blooming "sunshine" plant; extremely drought-tolerant.

Plant Profile: Coreopsis is a reliable workhorse of the summer garden, producing mass quantities of bright yellow, orange, or bicolor blooms. It is often called "Tickseed" because its seeds look like small, flat insects, but don't let the name fool you—it is one of the most cheerful flowers you can grow. In Zone 3, it is prized for its ability to handle rocky soil and intense summer heat without wilting.

Timing: Start indoors in March or direct sow in late May. It can also be direct-sown in the fall to sprout the following spring.

Starting: Sow 1/8 inch deep. Germination is usually very fast, with sprouts appearing in 7–14 days.

Growing: Full sun is essential. While it can handle poor soil, it needs good drainage to survive the winter.

Pro Tip: This plant is a "repeat bloomer." If you shear the whole plant back by a few inches after the first big flush of flowers in July, it will often reward you with a second round of blooms in late August.

Seed Saving: Once the petals fall off, the center "button" will remain. Wait for this button to turn dark brown and dry out completely. When it feels hard and crisp, snip the head. Rub the dried centers between your fingers to release the small, flat, dark seeds.

Culinary/Garden Uses:

- **Natural Dye:** Many varieties of Coreopsis (especially *C. tinctoria*) have been used historically to create vibrant yellow and orange dyes for wool and silk.
- **Mass Planting:** Because they stay in a tidy mound, they look spectacular when planted in a row along a path or the front of a border.

Cosmos (*Cosmos bipinnatus*)

- **Type:** Half-Hardy Annual
- **Ease of Growing:** Very Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Very Easy
- **Specialties:** Non-stop blooms; the "beginner's favorite."

Plant Profile: Cosmos are airy, delicate-looking plants that are surprisingly tough. They thrive in "poor" soil—too much fertilizer actually gives you more leaves and fewer flowers.

Timing: Direct sow in **late May** after the last frost. They grow so fast that indoor starting is rarely necessary.

Starting: Sow **5mm deep**. They germinate in 7–10 days.

Growing: Full sun. They can grow quite tall (up to 4 feet), so plant them at the back of the border. Deadhead (remove faded flowers) to keep the plant blooming until the first hard frost.

Seed Saving: Wait for the flower petals to fall off and the center to turn into a "hedgehog" of long, brown, needle-like seeds. Pull them off when they are dry.

Culinary/Garden Uses:

- **Pollinators:** A magnet for bees and lacewings (which eat aphids).
- **Edible:** Petals can be used as a colorful garnish in salads.

Dragonhead (*Dracocephalum moldavica*)

- **Type:** Annual (often self-seeds)
- **Ease of Growing:** Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Easy
- **Specialties:** Lemony-scented foliage; incredible for bees; very drought-resistant.

Plant Profile: Dragonhead is an underrated gem in the Northern garden. It produces hooded, deep-blue or violet flowers that look like a dragon's gaping mouth. The foliage has a distinct, pleasant citrus scent, and because it is native to cool, temperate climates, it thrives in the short, intense growing seasons of Zone 3.

Timing: Direct sow in mid-to-late May. It prefers to sprout when the soil has started to warm but can handle a light spring chill.

Starting: Sow 1/8 inch deep. Light helps germination, so do not bury them deeply. Just a light dusting of soil or a firm press into the earth is enough.

Growing: Full sun to partial shade. It is not picky about soil and is quite "tough." It doesn't require much fertilizer; in fact, it grows sturdier in leaner soil.

Seed Saving: As the blue flowers fade, the "cups" that held them (the calyx) will stay on the stem. These will turn from green to a dry, papery tan. Each cup contains four small, dark seeds. Once the spike is brown and dry, snip it and shake it into a bucket.

Culinary/Garden Uses:

- **Pollinator Power:** It is often called "Bee Balm's cousin" because it is a favorite for honeybees.
- **Tea:** The leaves can be dried and used for a refreshing, lemon-flavored herbal tea.

Delphinium (*Delphinium elatum*)

- **Type:** Hardy Perennial
- **Ease of Growing:** Moderate
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Easy
- **Specialties:** "The Queen of the Border"; provides dramatic 5-to-6-foot vertical spikes of blue and purple.

Plant Profile: Delphiniums are the quintessential cottage garden flower. They thrive in the cool summers of British Columbia and the Prairies. While they are stunning, they are "heavy feeders" and require a bit more attention than a wildflower, but the reward is a focal point that stops traffic.

Timing: Start indoors in March. Freshness is key—Delphinium seeds lose viability quickly, so use seeds from the previous season.

Starting: Sow 1/8 inch deep. Unlike many flowers, these actually prefer a slightly cooler room to germinate (around 15°C).

Growing: They need "rich" soil (lots of compost) and plenty of water. Because they grow so tall, they **must** be staked in Zone 3 to prevent summer winds or heavy rains from snapping the heavy flower spikes.

Seed Saving: Pods form along the central stalk after the flowers drop. Wait until the lowest pods on the spike turn brown and start to split slightly. Snip the whole spike and hang it upside down over a bucket to catch the small, dark seeds as they fall.

Culinary/Garden Uses:

- **Cutting Garden:** A single spike makes an entire vase look professional.
- **Vertical Interest:** Use them at the very back of a flower bed to create a "wall" of color.

Echinacea (*Echinacea purpurea*)

- **Type:** Hardy Perennial (Zone 3)
- **Ease of Growing:** Moderate
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Easy
- **Specialties:** High medicinal value; extremely cold-hardy.

Plant Profile: Also known as Purple Coneflower, this is a staple of the Northern garden. It takes a year or two to fully establish but will return faithfully every spring.

Timing: Best started indoors in **February or March** because they are slow to grow.

Starting: Sow **3mm deep**. They benefit from "cold stratification" (putting seeds in a damp paper towel in the fridge for 2 weeks before planting).

Growing: Full sun to partial shade. Very drought-tolerant once the deep taproot is established.

Seed Saving: The "cone" becomes very hard and prickly. Wait until it turns dark brown/black in late fall. Use gloves to break the cone apart and find the seeds inside.

Culinary/Garden Uses:

- **Medicinal:** Roots and flower heads are famously used in immune-boosting teas.
- **Winter Interest:** Leave the dried cones standing in winter to provide seeds for birds like Goldfinches.

Foxglove (*Digitalis purpurea*)

- **Type:** Biennial (leaves in year one; flowers in year two)
- **Ease of Growing:** Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Very Easy
- **Specialties:** Stunning vertical bells; perfect for the "shadier" corners of your yard.

Plant Profile: Foxgloves bring a sense of drama and fairy-tale charm to the garden. They produce tall, stately spikes covered in tubular flowers, usually with spotted "throats." **Safety Note:** All parts of the Foxglove are toxic if eaten, so plant them away from curious pets or toddlers.

Timing: Direct sow in early summer (June/July) to flower the following year, or start indoors in March.

Starting: Important: Seeds are tiny and **must** have light to germinate. Surface sow and do not cover with soil. Keep the surface misted so they don't dry out.

Growing: They prefer partial shade and rich, moist soil. In Zone 3, they love being tucked near a fence or under a deciduous tree where they are protected from the drying afternoon sun.

Seed Saving: A single Foxglove can produce over a million seeds. Wait for the pods at the bottom of the stalk to turn brown and crisp. They will start to crack open at the top. Simply hold a bag under the spike and shake—the tiny, reddish-brown seeds will pour out like sand.

Culinary/Garden Uses:

- **Bumblebee Favorite:** Watching a large bumblebee crawl entirely inside the "finger" of a Foxglove flower is a garden highlight.
- **Vertical Accent:** Excellent for adding height to the middle or back of a perennial border.

Gaillardia (*Blanket Flower*)

- **Type:** Perennial (short-lived but hardy)
- **Ease of Growing:** Very Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Easy
- **Specialties:** Heat and drought champion; blooms from early summer right until the first hard frost.

Plant Profile: Gaillardia is the "sunset" of the garden, featuring bold, daisy-like flowers in bands of red, orange, and yellow. It gets its name "Blanket Flower" because it can spread to cover the ground in a blanket of color. It is one of the hardiest perennials for Zone 3, unfazed by poor soil or drying winds.

Timing: Start indoors in March or direct sow in late May.

Starting: Sow 1/8 inch deep. They need warmth to germinate (around 21°C), so a sunny windowsill or a heat mat is helpful.

Growing: Full sun is mandatory. They hate "wet feet," so ensure they are in a well-draining spot. They are one of the best plants for a "neglected" corner of the garden because they thrive on minimal care.

Seed Saving: When the petals fall, a round, grey, fuzzy "ball" remains. As it dries, it becomes brittle. When the seed head feels prickly and the seeds pull away easily with a light tug, they are ready. The seeds have a small "needle" on the end.

Culinary/Garden Uses:

- **Groundcover:** Great for stabilizing slopes or filling in rocky areas where other plants die.
- **Long Bloom:** While other flowers fade in the August heat, Gaillardia just keeps going.

Heliopsis (Heliopsis helianthoides)

- **Type:** Hardy Perennial
- **Ease of Growing:** Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Easy
- **Specialties:** Often called "False Sunflower"; extremely cold-hardy and blooms much earlier than true sunflowers.

Plant Profile: Heliopsis is a stalwart of the Northern garden. It looks like a refined, multi-branched sunflower with golden-yellow petals and a prominent center. Unlike true sunflowers, which are mostly annuals, Heliopsis returns every year and is much more manageable in size (usually 3–4 feet). It is incredibly tough and handles Zone 3 winters without a flinch.

Timing: Start indoors in March or direct sow in late May.

Starting: Sow 1/8 inch deep. They germinate best with a bit of warmth, so a sunny window is perfect. If you direct sow in the fall, they will naturally sprout in the spring.

Growing: Full sun. They are very adaptable to different soil types, including the heavier clay often found in parts of BC. They don't need much fertilizer; too much "rich" food can actually make the stems weak and floppy.

Seed Saving: Wait for the flower heads to lose their petals and turn completely brown and dry. The center "cone" will become hard and brittle. Rub the dried heads over a bowl to release the small, dark, angular seeds.

Culinary/Garden Uses:

- **Pollinator Magnet:** One of the best plants for attracting native bees and late-summer butterflies.
- **Cut Flowers:** They have very sturdy stems and a long vase life, making them excellent for bouquets.

Hollyhock (*Alcea rosea*)

- **Type:** Biennial or Short-Lived Perennial
- **Ease of Growing:** Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Very Easy
- **Specialties:** Classic "Cottage Garden" look; provides massive height (up to 8 feet).

Plant Profile: Hollyhocks are the skyscrapers of the garden. They produce large, saucer-shaped flowers that march up a thick, central stalk. In Zone 3, they are often grown as biennials—growing a cluster of leaves in year one and a massive flowering spike in year two. They are famous for "self-seeding," meaning once you plant them, they usually stick around forever by dropping their own seeds.

Timing: Direct sow in early June for flowers the following year, or start indoors in March if you want to try for first-year blooms (though this is rare in short seasons).

Starting: Sow 1/4 inch deep. The seeds are large and flat, making them easy for beginners to handle.

Growing: Full sun. Because they are so tall, plant them against a fence, wall, or the side of a house to protect them from being knocked over by the wind. They can get "rust" (orange spots on leaves), so water at the base of the plant rather than from above.

Seed Saving: After the flowers fall, a round "button" or pod forms. Wait for the pod to turn brown and the outer husk to feel like paper. Inside, you'll find a "wheel" of flat, coin-shaped seeds. Simply peel them apart.

Culinary/Garden Uses:

- **Screening:** Perfect for hiding an ugly fence or a compost pile.
- **Old-Fashioned Charm:** A favorite for creating that "grandma's garden" aesthetic.

Lavatera (*Lavatera trimestris*)

- **Type:** Annual
- **Ease of Growing:** Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Easy
- **Specialties:** Also called "Rose Mallow"; produces huge, satiny, hibiscus-like blooms.

Plant Profile: If you want the look of a tropical Hibiscus but live in a cold climate, Lavatera is your best friend. It grows into a bushy, shrub-like plant covered in shimmering pink or white flowers. It grows incredibly fast, making it perfect for filling large gaps in a garden bed in a single season.

Timing: Direct sow in late May. They have sensitive roots and generally do not like being moved once they've started growing.

Starting: Sow 1/4 inch deep. They germinate quickly in warm soil.

Growing: Full sun. While they can handle some drought, they will produce much larger and more frequent flowers if kept consistently moist. They are "clean" plants that don't require a lot of deadheading to look good.

Seed Saving: Once the flower falls off, a green, ring-shaped pod forms (it looks a bit like a tiny wheel of cheese). Wait for this "cheese wheel" to turn dark brown and dry out. The "slices" of the wheel are the individual seeds. Pick them once they feel crisp.

Culinary/Garden Uses:

- **Instant Privacy:** Because it grows so bushy, a row of Lavatera can act as a temporary summer hedge.
- **Showstopper:** The satiny texture of the petals makes them look almost iridescent in the morning light.

Liatris (*Liatris spicata*)

- **Type:** Hardy Perennial
- **Ease of Growing:** Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Moderate
- **Specialties:** Also called "Blazing Star"; unique spikes that bloom from the top down.

Plant Profile: Liatris is a prairie native that is perfectly suited for the Canadian climate. It produces fuzzy, purple or white wands that look like feather dusters. Unlike almost every other spiked flower, Liatris starts blooming at the very tip and works its way down to the bottom. It grows from a bulb-like structure called a "corm" but can easily be started from seed.

Timing: Start indoors in February (requires a cold period) or direct sow in late autumn.

Starting: Tip: For best results, give the seeds "Cold Stratification." Place seeds in a damp paper towel in the fridge for 4–6 weeks before planting. Then, sow 1/8 inch deep.

Growing: Full sun. Liatris is extremely drought-tolerant once established but can also handle moist soil better than many other perennials. It doesn't need staking despite its height, as the stems are very rigid.

Seed Saving: Once the purple "fuzz" turns into a tan, tattered-looking fluff, the seeds are ready. Grasp the spike and pull upward; if the seeds pull away easily, they are ripe. The seeds are long and thin with a little "parachute" on the end.

Culinary/Garden Uses:

- **Butterfly Magnet:** This is a top-tier nectar plant for Monarch butterflies.
- **Winter Interest:** If you don't harvest the seeds, the dried brown spikes look beautiful sticking out of the snow.

Lobelia (*Lobelia erinus*)

- **Type:** Tender Annual (in Zone 3)
- **Ease of Growing:** Moderate
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Difficult (due to seed size)
- **Specialties:** Intense "true blue" color; perfect for spilling over the edges of containers.

Plant Profile: While most flowers are light blue or purple, Lobelia provides an electric, deep blue that is rare in the garden. It grows in low, dense mounds or trailing curtains. It loves the cooler temperatures of early summer and autumn, often taking a "nap" or blooming less during the intense heat of July.

Timing: Start indoors very early (late February or early March). It grows slowly at first.

Starting: Crucial Step: The seeds are like dust. Surface sow them onto moist soil and **do not cover**. They need light to germinate. Bottom-watering (putting the tray in a shallow pan of water) is best so you don't wash the tiny seeds away.

Growing: Full sun to partial shade. In Zone 3, it can handle full sun as long as it stays moist. If the plant stops blooming in mid-summer, shear it back by half and it will flush with new flowers when the weather cools.

Seed Saving: This is a challenge for beginners! Look for the tiny, pea-sized green pods that form after flowers fade. Wait for them to turn tan and papery. Carefully snip them into a paper bag. Shake the bag vigorously; the seeds are so small they look like brown dust at the bottom.

Culinary/Garden Uses:

- **Container Essential:** The perfect "spiller" for hanging baskets or window boxes.
- **Blue Border:** Creates a crisp, low-growing edge for garden paths.

Marigold (*Tagetes*)

- **Type:** Annual
- **Ease of Growing:** Very Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Very Easy
- **Specialties:** Classic "guardian" of the vegetable patch; helps deter certain soil pests.

Plant Profile: Marigolds are the quintessential beginner flower. They are cheerful, rugged, and bloom non-stop from June until the first hard frost. They come in two main types: "French" (small and bushy) and "African" (tall with massive, pom-pom heads). They have a distinct, pungent scent that many gardeners love (and many bugs hate).

Timing: Start indoors in April or direct sow in late May once the soil is warm.

Starting: Sow 1/4 inch deep. They are very fast to sprout, usually appearing in 3–5 days.

Growing: Full sun. Marigolds are not picky about soil but do best with regular watering. Deadheading (pinching off the dead flowers) will keep the plant producing new blooms all summer long.

Seed Saving: Let the flower head dry completely on the plant until the base (the green "cup") turns brown and feels crisp. Pull the dried petals out; attached to them will be a cluster of long, thin, black-and-white seeds that look like tiny porcupine quills.

Culinary/Garden Uses:

- **Trap Crop:** Often planted with tomatoes to help deter nematodes and aphids.
- **Edible Petals:** The petals can be used as a "poor man's saffron" to add a golden tint to rice or salads.

Monarda (*Bee Balm / Wild Bergamot*)

- **Type:** Hardy Perennial
- **Ease of Growing:** Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Moderate
- **Specialties:** Shaggy "firework" blooms; highly aromatic; a favorite for hummingbirds.

Plant Profile: Monarda is a member of the mint family, meaning it is tough, vigorous, and smells amazing. The flowers look like colorful explosions of tubular petals. It is a staple of the North American prairie, making it perfectly adapted to cold winters and hot, dry summers.

Timing: Start indoors in March or direct sow in late autumn.

Starting: Sow 1/8 inch deep. The seeds are small, so don't bury them too far. They germinate best when the soil is around 18°C–21°C.

Growing: Full sun to partial shade. Because it is in the mint family, it can spread via underground runners; plant it where it has room to wander or in a contained bed.

Tip: To prevent "powdery mildew" (a white film on leaves), ensure it has good airflow and water at the base of the plant.

Seed Saving: After the petals fall, you'll be left with a hard, round "button" or head. Wait until this head turns brown and the tiny tubes inside look dry. Snip the heads and put them in a paper bag; shake vigorously or crush the heads with your fingers to release the small, brown, nut-like seeds.

Culinary/Garden Uses:

- **Oswego Tea:** The leaves have a spicy, citrus-like scent and can be used fresh or dried for tea.
- **Pollinator Magnet:** It is one of the top three plants for attracting clearwing hawkmoths and hummingbirds.

Nasturtium (*Tropaeolum majus*)

- **Type:** Annual
- **Ease of Growing:** Very Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Very Easy
- **Specialties:** Entirely edible; excellent "trap crop" for pests.

Plant Profile: Nasturtiums are vibrant, trailing plants that come in jewel tones of orange, red, and yellow. They are often planted as "companions" because they draw aphids away from your vegetables.

Timing: Direct sow in **late May**. They do not like being transplanted.

Starting: Sow **1.5cm deep** (the seeds are large, like chickpeas).

Growing: Full sun to partial shade. Like Cosmos, they prefer "lean" soil. In rich soil, the leaves will hide the flowers.

Seed Saving: After the flowers fade, large green "tri-lobed" seeds will form. Wait for them to fall to the ground and turn tan/wrinkled—then just pick them up.

Culinary/Garden Uses:

- **Edible:** The flowers have a peppery, watercress-like flavor. The leaves are high in Vitamin C.
- **"Poor Man's Capers":** The green seeds can be pickled in vinegar.

Nicotiana (*Flowering Tobacco*) (*Nicotiana glauca*)

- **Type:** Annual
- **Ease of Growing:** Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Easy
- **Specialties:** Evening fragrance, Attracts moths and hummingbirds

Plant Profile: Nicotiana produces elegant, tubular flowers that release a powerful, jasmine-like scent after the sun goes down. It is a "must-have" for gardens near patios or bedroom windows.

Timing: Start indoors **6–8 weeks** before the last frost.

Starting: The seeds are tiny. Surface-sow them and **do not cover** with soil. They need light and 10–20 days to germinate.

Growing: Does well in full sun to partial shade. In Zone 3, it appreciates a bit of afternoon shade during our long June days. Keep the soil moist.

Seed Saving: After the flower falls, a small egg-shaped pod remains. Once the pod turns brown and the top "cracks" open, it will be full of thousands of tiny brown seeds. Tip the pod into an envelope.

Petunia (*Petunia x hybrida*)

- **Type:** Tender Annual
- **Ease of Growing:** Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Moderate
- **Specialties:** Non-stop color; famous for their scent, especially in the evening.

Plant Profile: Petunias are the workhorses of the summer garden. They come in every color imaginable and are loved for their ability to bloom continuously from spring until the first heavy frost. While they are often bought as "starts," growing them from seed gives you access to unique heirloom varieties not found in big-box stores.

Timing: Start indoors early (late February or March). They need a long head start to flower by June.

Starting: Crucial Step: Like Lobelia, Petunia seeds are tiny and **need light** to sprout. Surface sow on moist soil and do not cover. Use a clear dome or plastic wrap to keep humidity in until they sprout.

Growing: Full sun. Petunias are "hungry" plants—they love a bit of compost or liquid fertilizer every few weeks. If they start to look "leggy" or thin in August, don't be afraid to give them a "haircut" (trimming back 1/3 of the stems) to encourage new, bushy growth.

Seed Saving: Look for the small, green, egg-shaped pods at the base of where a flower has finished. Once the pod turns brown and feels crisp, it will split open. The seeds inside are tiny, dark, and look like grains of sand.

Culinary/Garden Uses:

- **Fragrance:** Varieties like 'Old Fashioned Vining' release a beautiful perfume at dusk.
- **Baskets:** Ideal for hanging baskets where they can trail down several feet.

Poppy (*Papaver*)

- **Type:** Annual (Self-seeding)
- **Ease of Growing:** Very Easy (Direct sow only)
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Very Easy
- **Specialties:** Bee favorite, Ornamental seed pods

Plant Profile: Poppies provide an explosion of color in early summer. While the individual blooms are short-lived, the plant produces many over several weeks. They are famous for "finding their own spot" in the garden.

Timing: Direct sow only. In Zone 3, sow seeds on top of the soil in late April—they don't mind a bit of frost. They are nearly impossible to transplant, so indoor starting is not recommended.

Starting: Seeds saved indoors over winter need to be **cold stratified** to germinate. Simply scatter seeds over prepared soil. They require **light to germinate**, so do not bury them.

Growing: Poppies prefer "lean" soil—don't over-fertilize or they will grow lots of leaves but few flowers. Thin seedlings to **15cm** apart.

Seed Saving: Wait until the petals fall and the green seed pod dries into a hard, brown "pepper shaker." When the tiny holes open under the "lid" of the pod, shake the seeds into a jar.

Purple Tansy (*Phacelia*)

- **Type:** Annual
- **Ease of Growing:** Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Easy
- **Specialties:** Top-tier pollinator plant, "Green manure" cover crop

Plant Profile: One of the best plants for honeybees and native bees. The flowers are unusual, curling like a fern frond and blooming in a soft lavender-blue. It has lacy, fern-like foliage.

Timing: Direct sow in the garden from May through June. To keep bees in your garden all summer, sow a small patch every two weeks.

Starting: Sow **5mm deep**. Unlike most flowers, *Phacelia* seeds prefer **darkness** to germinate.

Growing: Very drought-tolerant once established. It grows quickly and can reach 60cm.

Seed Saving: As the "coils" of flowers brown and dry, they will contain small pods. Cut the whole coil when most of it is dry and place it in a paper bag to finish drying before shaking out the seeds.

Queen Anne's Lace (*Ammi majus* / *Daucus carota*)

- **Type:** Annual / Biennial
- **Ease of Growing:** Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Easy
- **Specialties:** Intricate white "lace" flowers; the ultimate filler for bouquets.

Plant Profile: This plant produces large, flat-topped clusters of tiny white flowers that look like delicate lace doilies. It adds a wild, airy feel to any garden bed. It is actually a wild relative of the carrot—if you pull it up, you'll notice the root smells exactly like a grocery store carrot!

Timing: Direct sow in late May. They have a long taproot and do not like being moved once planted.

Starting: Sow 1/8 inch deep. They are very reliable germinators and often appear within 10–14 days.

Growing: Full sun. They are very self-sufficient and don't require much water once they are a few inches tall. In Zone 3, they are excellent at "filling in" gaps between larger perennials.

Seed Saving: This is one of the most visual seed-saving processes. As the flower dies, the flat "lace" head curls inward, forming a tight ball that looks like a miniature bird's nest. Once this "nest" is completely brown and brittle, snip it off. Rub the nest between your hands to release the prickly, aromatic seeds.

Culinary/Garden Uses:

- **Flower Arranging:** Professional florists use this as the "gold standard" for adding texture to bouquets.
- **Beneficial Insects:** The flat landing pads are perfect for tiny parasitic wasps (the good kind!) that eat garden pests.

Rudbeckia (*Black-Eyed Susan*)

- **Type:** Perennial or Hardy Annual (depending on variety)
- **Ease of Growing:** Very Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Easy
- **Specialties:** Late-summer staple; incredibly sturdy and heat-tolerant.

Plant Profile: Rudbeckia is the "gold standard" of the late-summer garden. With their bright yellow petals and dark, chocolate-colored centers, they provide a massive burst of color just as other flowers are starting to fade. They are exceptionally hardy in Zone 3 and are known for their ability to handle wind and rain without drooping.

Timing: Start indoors in March or direct sow in late May.

Starting: Sow 1/8 inch deep. They need a little bit of light to germinate best, so only cover them with a very thin layer of soil.

Growing: Full sun. These are very "low-maintenance" plants. They aren't picky about soil and can handle dry spells once their root systems are established. If you have the perennial variety (*Rudbeckia fulgida*), it will spread slowly into a beautiful, dense clump over the years.

Seed Saving: Wait for the yellow petals to fall and the central dark "cone" to become hard, black, and completely dry. You should be able to poke the cone and feel it move like a solid piece of wood. Rub the cone vigorously over a bowl to release the small, black, needle-like seeds.

Culinary/Garden Uses:

- **Pollinator Buffet:** Butterflies and bees will flock to these in August and September.
- **Winter Interest:** The dark cones stay upright all winter, providing a beautiful contrast against the white snow.

Snapdragon (*Antirrhinum majus*)

- **Type:** Half-Hardy Annual (often self-seeds)
- **Ease of Growing:** Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Easy
- **Specialties:** Cool-weather champion; blooms early and late.

Plant Profile: Snapdragons love the cool Northern spring. They can actually handle a light frost, making them a great choice for early color in May.

Timing: Start indoors in **March**. The seeds are tiny and need light to sprout.

Starting: Surface sow (do not cover with soil). Lightly press into the dirt.

Growing: Full sun. Keep the soil moist. Pinch the central stem when the plant is 4 inches tall to encourage a multi-stemmed "bush" of flowers.

Seed Saving: The flower spike will turn into a row of small, dried pods that look like tiny "skulls." Shake the pods over a bowl to release the dust-like seeds.

Culinary/Garden Uses:

- **Cut Flowers:** Outstanding in bouquets; they bloom from the bottom of the spike upward.
- **Interactive:** Kids love "pinching" the sides of the flowers to make the dragon's mouth open.

Strawflower (*Xerochrysum bracteatum*)

- **Type:** Annual
- **Ease of Growing:** Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Easy
- **Specialties:** The best "everlasting" flower; petals feel like stiff paper even while growing.

Plant Profile: Strawflowers are a delight for the tactile gardener. Their "petals" are actually stiff bracts that feel like dried straw while the plant is still alive. They come in stunning shades of copper, rose, yellow, and white. Because they are already "dry," they hold their color for years after being cut.

Timing: Start indoors in March or April. They have a relatively long growing season, so a head start is helpful in Zone 3.

Starting: Surface sow and press firmly into the soil. Like many on this list, they **need light** to germinate.

Growing: Full sun and well-drained soil. They are quite drought-tolerant.

Pro Tip: If you want to dry them for bouquets, cut the flowers when the outer 2–3 rows of "petals" have opened but the center is still closed. They will finish opening as they dry!

Seed Saving: To save seeds, you must leave the flower on the plant until it "blows" open. The center will turn into a fluffy, dandelion-like head. When the fluff starts to catch the wind, pull the head off. The seeds are attached to the bottom of the white, fuzzy "parachutes."

Culinary/Garden Uses:

- **Crafting:** Ideal for making permanent wreaths or dried floral arrangements.
- **Long Life:** They are one of the few flowers that look exactly the same on the plant as they do in a vase three years later.

Sunflower (*Helianthus*)

- **Type:** Annual
- **Ease of Growing:** Very Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Moderate (due to birds!)
- **Specialties:** Edible seeds, Pollinator favorite, Bird food

Plant Profile: Sunflowers are the icons of summer. In Zone 3, they are prized for their speed and ability to provide height. Large varieties can be used as living trellises for peas or beans.

Timing: Direct sow in **late May**. While you can start them indoors 2 weeks early, they have sensitive taproots and often do better when planted directly into the warm garden soil.

Starting: Sow seeds **1cm deep**. Space giant varieties **1m** apart and dwarf varieties **15cm** apart.

Growing: They are "heavy feeders." Add compost to the soil before planting. In BC's interior, they need deep watering during hot July spells to prevent the heavy heads from drooping.

Seed Saving: You must beat the birds! Once the back of the flower head turns from green to yellow/brown and the petals fall off, rub your thumb over the seeds. If they feel hard and come away easily, cut the head and hang it in a dry, bird-proof area to finish drying.

Sweet Alyssum (*Lobularia*)

- **Type:** Annual
- **Ease of Growing:** Very Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Easy
- **Specialties:** Honey-scented, Attracts predatory wasps (pest control)

Plant Profile: A low-growing carpet of white or purple flowers that smells like honey. It is a powerful "functional" plant, attracting tiny beneficial wasps that eat garden pests like aphids.

Timing: Direct sow in early May. It is very frost-hardy and will often be the last thing blooming in a Zone 3 October.

Starting: Surface sow; seeds need **light to germinate**.

Growing: Great for containers or as a "living mulch" between rows of vegetables. If it gets "scraggly" in August, give it a "haircut" with scissors to stimulate new growth.

Seed Saving: This is a "shattering" plant. As the flowers fade, tiny round pods form. When the pods turn yellow-brown, place a sheet or tray under the plant and shake it to collect the seeds.

Sweet William (*Dianthus*)

- **Type:** Biennial (Lives 2 years)
- **Ease of Growing:** Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Easy
- **Specialties:** Edible flowers, Spicy clove scent, Long-lasting cut flower

Plant Profile: A traditional favorite with flat-topped clusters of fringed flowers. In its first year, it grows a tuft of green leaves; in the second year, it sends up flowers. A prolific self seeder if not deadheaded.

Timing: Start indoors in **March** for a chance at flowers the first year, or direct sow in **June/July** to establish plants for next summer.

Starting: Barely cover seeds with soil. They prefer a cooler germination temperature (**15–18°C**).

Growing: Prefers full sun and well-drained soil. They do not like "wet feet" during the winter, so plant them in a spot where snowmelt doesn't puddle.

Seed Saving: After the flower clusters die, small pods form at the base of each flower. Wait until the pods turn brown and the tips open. Shake the pods into a container to collect the small, black, flake-like seeds.

Sweet Pea (*Lathyrus*)

- **Type:** Annual Climber
- **Ease of Growing:** Moderate
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Easy
- **Specialties:** Incredible fragrance, Excellent for cutting

Plant Profile: These are not the same as garden peas (the seeds are **toxic** if eaten). They are grown for their ruffled, intensely fragrant flowers and climbing habit. They love the cool springs of Zone 3.

Timing: Plant as early as the soil can be worked (April). They thrive in cool weather and "shut down" once the BC heatwaves of July/August hit.

Starting: Sow seeds **2cm deep**. To help the hard seed coat, you can nick the seed with a file or soak them in water for 24 hours before planting.

Growing: They **MUST** have a trellis or fence to climb. "Cool roots, warm tops" is the rule—mulch the base of the plants to keep the roots cool while the vines grow into the sun. Harvest the flowers to encourage more blooms.

Seed Saving: Allow the pods to stay on the vine until they turn brown and feel like parchment. **Caution:** Ensure these are clearly labeled as "Flower Seeds - Do Not Eat" to distinguish them from edible garden peas.

Tithonia (Mexican Torch) (*Tithonia sp*)

- **Type:** Tender Annual
- **Ease of Growing:** Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Easy
- **Specialties:** Pollinator magnet (Monarch butterflies), Tall vertical accent

Plant Profile: A spectacular, fast-growing plant that produces velvet-textured, fiery orange blooms. While it loves heat, it performs well in BC summers if given a warm, south-facing spot. It can grow up to 1.5m tall in a single season.

Timing: Must be started indoors in Zone 3—our soil stays cold too long for direct sowing. Start **6–8 weeks** before the last frost. Do not transplant outside until mid-June when nights are warm.

Starting: Press seeds onto the soil surface; they need **bright light** to germinate. Maintain a warm soil temperature of **21°C**.

Growing: Plant in the warmest, sunniest spot you have. Because they grow so tall so fast, they may need staking to protect them from heavy winds.

Seed Saving: The center of the flower turns into a prickly, hard cone. Once the cone is brown and completely dry, pull it apart to find the large, wedge-shaped seeds.

Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*)

- **Type:** Hardy Perennial
- **Ease of Growing:** Very Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Easy
- **Specialties:** Fern-like foliage; medicinal history; survives almost anything.

Plant Profile: Yarrow is one of the toughest plants you can put in a Zone 3 garden. It features soft, feathery leaves and flat-topped clusters of tiny flowers. It is a "pioneer plant," meaning it grows well in poor soil where other plants struggle. It is a true perennial that will survive the harshest Canadian winters with ease.

Timing: Start indoors in March or direct sow in May.

Starting: Surface sow. The seeds are very small and require light. Just press them into the surface of the damp soil.

Growing: Full sun. Yarrow is famously drought-tolerant. In fact, if the soil is too rich or wet, the plant may grow too fast and fall over. It is best to "treat it mean" by giving it less water and fertilizer once it's established.

Seed Saving: The flower clusters will turn from bright colors (yellow, pink, or white) to a dull, dry brown. Once the entire flat head is brown and brittle, snip it off. Rub the flower heads between your palms over a bucket to release the tiny, flat, grey-white seeds.

Culinary/Garden Uses:

- **Beneficial Insect Magnet:** The flat "landing pad" flowers are the favorite home of ladybugs and lacewings, which eat garden pests like aphids.
- **Soil Healer:** Yarrow is deep-rooted and helps bring minerals to the surface of the soil.

Zinnia (*Zinnia elegans*)

- **Type:** Annual
- **Ease of Growing:** Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Moderate
- **Specialties:** Outstanding cut flower, Heat-tolerant

Plant Profile: Zinnias are the "cut and come again" champions. The more flowers you harvest for bouquets, the more the plant produces. They are stiff, sturdy plants that love the heat.

Timing: Zinnias hate cold soil. Direct sow in **early June**, or start indoors **4 weeks** before the last frost. They do not like being root-bound, so transplant them while they are still small.

Starting: Cover seeds with **5mm** of soil.

Growing: Give them full sun and plenty of space (**30cm**) for air circulation. Avoid overhead watering to prevent mildew.

Seed Saving: Let a flower head dry completely on the plant until it is stiff and brown. Pull the head apart; the seeds are the small, shield-shaped "petals" attached to the base. Note: Only the seeds from the outer rows of petals are usually viable in many varieties.

HERBS

Basil (*Ocimum basilicum*)

- **Type:** Tender Annual
- **Ease of Growing:** Easy (Needs heat)
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Easy
- **Specialties:** Culinary staple, Great for containers, Bee favorite (if allowed to flower)

Plant Profile: Basil is a highly aromatic herb essential for pesto and fresh summer dishes. In Zone 3, it is best treated as a "summer-only" guest. It is extremely sensitive to cold; even a dip to 5°C can turn the leaves black. It thrives in the long daylight hours of a BC interior summer but requires a sheltered, warm spot.

Timing: Do not rush Basil outdoors. Start indoors 6 weeks before the last frost. Only transplant outside in mid-to-late June once the soil is warm and night temperatures are reliably above 10°C.

Starting: Sow seeds 1cm deep. Basil is prone to "damping off" (rotting) in our cool spring air. Use a heat mat to maintain 21°C for germination and ensure excellent air circulation.

Growing: Plant in full sun in rich, well-draining soil. Once the plant has 3 sets of leaves, pinch off the top center stem to encourage a bushy habit. Continually pinch off any flower buds that appear to keep the leaves tasting sweet; once it flowers, the flavor becomes bitter.

Seed Saving: To save seeds, you must let the plant flower in late summer. Small black seeds will form in the dried flower "husks." Once the flower spikes are brown and crispy, snip them into a bag and crush them to release the seeds.

Chives (*Allium schoenoprasum*)

- **Type:** Hardy Perennial (Zone 3)
- **Ease of Growing:** Very Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Easy
- **Specialties:** First green of spring; edible flowers.

Plant Profile: Chives are the "indestructible" herb of the North. They are often the very first green shoots to poke through the melting snow in April. They grow in clumps and feature beautiful purple pom-pom flowers in early summer.

Timing: Direct sow in early May, or transplant clumps at any time. They are frost-hardy and don't mind cold soil.

Starting: Sow 5mm deep. Seeds can be slow to start, so many gardeners prefer to start with a "division" (digging up a chunk of an established clump).

Growing: Full sun to partial shade. They are not picky about soil but appreciate a little compost. To keep the leaves tender, cut the plant back to 2 inches above the ground after it flowers; it will regrow fresh, succulent leaves.

Seed Saving: Allow the purple flowers to turn tan and dry. Inside the flower head, you will find small, angular black seeds. Shake them into a container.

Culinary Uses:

- **Fresh:** Snip into salads, baked potatoes, or omelets for a mild onion flavor.
- **Edible Flowers:** Pull the purple florets apart and sprinkle them over dishes for a stunning, spicy garnish.
- **Vinegar:** Steep the blossoms in white vinegar to create a bright pink, onion-infused dressing.

Cilantro / Coriander (*Coriandrum sativum*)

- **Type:** Annual
- **Ease of Growing:** Easy (Likes cool weather)
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Very Easy
- **Specialties:** Two-in-one herb (leaves = Cilantro, seeds = Coriander), Pollinator magnet

Plant Profile: Cilantro is a fast-growing herb that actually prefers the cool spring and fall of Zone 3 over the mid-July heat. Heat causes the plant to "bolt" (send up a flower stalk), at which point the leaf flavor changes. The flowers are highly attractive to beneficial predatory wasps that eat garden pests.

Timing: Direct sow as soon as the soil can be worked in spring (late April). For a steady supply of leaves, sow a new patch every 2 weeks until the heat of July, then start again in August for a fall crop.

Starting: Sow 2cm deep. Cilantro has a taproot and does not like being moved; direct sowing in the garden or in deep permanent pots is best.

Growing: Prefers full sun but will last longer before bolting if given some afternoon shade during a BC heatwave. Keep the soil moist.

Seed Saving: Once the plant bolts and flowers, it will produce green round seeds. Wait for the seeds to turn light brown and dry on the plant. Harvest the entire head into a paper bag; these are your Coriander seeds for cooking or planting next year.

Dill (*Anethum graveolens*)

- **Type:** Annual
- **Ease of Growing:** Very Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Very Easy
- **Specialties:** Essential for pickling, Swallowtail butterfly host plant, Beneficial insect magnet

Plant Profile: Dill is a hardy, upright herb with feathery foliage and large yellow "umbrella" flowers. It is incredibly beneficial for the garden ecosystem, attracting ladybugs and hoverflies. In Zone 3, it grows vigorously and often self-seeds for the following year.

Timing: Direct sow in the garden starting in early May. Like Cilantro, it can be sown every few weeks for a continuous harvest of "dill weed" (leaves).

Starting: Sow seeds on the surface or barely cover (2mm deep), as they need light to germinate. Do not bother with indoor starting; it grows so fast and hates transplanting so much that direct sowing is always better.

Growing: Full sun. Dill can grow quite tall (up to 1m), so plant it at the back of the garden or near a fence. Once the plant reaches 60cm, avoid watering from above to prevent powdery mildew.

Seed Saving: Harvest the seeds when the large flower heads turn from green to brown. Cut the entire head and hang it upside down inside a paper bag. The seeds will fall into the bottom of the bag as they dry.

Mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*)

- **Type:** Hardy Biennial
- **Ease of Growing:** Very Easy (Self-seeds readily)
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Very Easy
- **Specialties:** Dramatic vertical accent; "The Torch" of the garden.

Plant Profile: Mullein is a striking plant that grows a soft, silvery-green rosette of "fuzzy" leaves in its first year. In its second year, it sends up a massive flower spike that can reach 2 meters tall. It is extremely drought-tolerant and thrives in the rocky or sandy soils often found in BC interiors.

Timing: Direct sow in spring or fall. The seeds need a period of cold (stratification) to germinate well.

Starting: Sow on the surface or very shallowly, as they need light to germinate. Space plants 60cm apart—they get quite large!

Growing: Thrives in "neglected" areas with full sun. It does not need fertilizer. If you don't want it to take over your garden, cut the flower spike down before the seeds drop.

Seed Saving: One spike produces thousands of tiny seeds. Wait until the seed pods on the tall stalk turn brown and dry, then strip them into a bucket.

Culinary/Medicinal Uses:

- **Tea:** The leaves and flowers are traditionally used in herbal teas for respiratory support.
Note: Always strain through a fine coffee filter to remove the tiny "fuzzy" hairs which can irritate the throat.
- **Infused Oil:** The yellow flowers can be steeped in olive oil to create a traditional remedy for earaches.
- **Torch:** Historically, the dried stalks were dipped in tallow and used as torches.

Mustard (*Brassica juncea*)

- **Type:** Hardy Annual
- **Ease of Growing:** Very Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Easy
- **Specialties:** High-speed crop; natural soil "bio-fumigant."

Plant Profile: Mustard is a dual-purpose plant. You can grow it for "Greens" (sharp, spicy leaves) or for "Seeds" (to make condiment mustard). Like Arugula, it loves cool weather and will bolt quickly once the July heat hits.

Timing: Direct sow as soon as the soil can be worked (late April). For a seed harvest, plant in May. For greens, sow every 3 weeks until June.

Starting: Sow 5mm deep. Germination is very fast (3–5 days). Thin to 15cm for greens or 30cm if growing for seed.

Growing: Very low maintenance. It grows so fast it usually outcompetes weeds. If grown as a "green manure," dig the plants back into the soil before they flower to improve soil health.

Seed Saving: Allow the yellow flowers to form pods. Wait until the pods are dry and "brittle-to-the-touch." Shatter the pods over a tray to collect the round mustard seeds.

Culinary Uses:

- **Fresh Greens:** Add young leaves to salads for a "wasabi-like" kick.
- **Sautéed:** Larger leaves mellow out when cooked with fat (like bacon or olive oil).
- **Condiment:** Grind the dried seeds and mix with vinegar, water, and salt to make your own "stone-ground" mustard.

Parsley (*Petroselinum crispum*)

- **Type:** Biennial (Grown as an annual in Zone 3)
- **Ease of Growing:** Easy (Slow to start)
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Moderate (Takes 2 years)
- **Specialties:** High in vitamins, Companion plant for tomatoes and roses

Plant Profile: Whether curly or flat-leaf (Italian), parsley is a cold-hardy workhorse. In Zone 3, it will often stay green under the snow well into early winter. Because it is a biennial, it spends its first year growing leaves and its second year producing seeds.

Timing: Parsley is notoriously slow to germinate (up to 3 weeks). Start indoors in mid-March or direct sow in May. To speed up germination, soak seeds in warm water for 24 hours before planting.

Starting: Sow 1 cm deep. Use individual pots to avoid disturbing the long taproot when transplanting.

Growing: Prefers rich, moist soil in full sun to partial shade. In the BC interior, it appreciates some shade during the hottest part of the day.

Seed Saving: To save seeds in Zone 3, you must heavily mulch the roots over winter to help the plant survive. In the second spring, it will send up a tall flower stalk. Harvest seeds when they turn dark brown and dry.

Summer Savory (*Satureja hortensis*)

- **Type:** Annual
- **Ease of Growing:** Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Easy
- **Specialties:** "The Bean Herb," Honeybee favorite, Pest repellent

Plant Profile: A delicate-looking but sturdy aromatic herb. It is traditionally planted next to beans because it is said to improve their flavor and deter bean beetles. It has a spicy, peppery scent and is a key ingredient in many dried herb blends.

Timing: Start indoors 4–6 weeks before the last frost, or direct sow in late May once the soil has warmed.

Starting: The seeds are very small. Press them into the soil surface but do not cover; they require light to sprout.

Growing: Full sun and well-drained soil. It only grows to about 25cm tall, making it a great "front of the border" plant.

Seed Saving: Once the plant flowers and the stalks begin to turn brown, pull the entire plant up and hang it upside down in a paper bag. The tiny seeds will collect at the bottom of the bag as the plant dries.

NATIVE PLANTS

Buckwheat (*Fagopyrum esculentum*)

- **Type:** Fast-Growing Annual
- **Ease of Growing:** Very Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Easy
- **Specialties:** "Green Manure" (soil builder), Top-tier pollinator plant, Weed smotherer.

Plant Profile:

Buckwheat is the king of the "cover crops." It has succulent stems and heart-shaped leaves that grow so densely they shade out weeds. In Northern BC, it is commonly used to "reclaim" a patch of weedy ground or to provide a quick nectar source for honeybees. It is extremely sensitive to frost—it will die at the first touch of frost—but its speed makes it a reliable summer crop.

Timing: Direct sow anytime from **late May to mid-July**. Do not plant until the soil is at least **15°C**. It matures so quickly (70–90 days for seed, 30 days for flowers) that you can often squeeze in a crop after your early radishes or spinach are finished.

Starting: Sow **2–3cm deep**. You can "broadcast" the seed (scatter by hand) and lightly rake it into the soil. Aim for about 2–3 seeds per square inch.

Growing: Buckwheat requires part to full sun, is not picky about soil and actually thrives in "poor" soil where other plants struggle.

Important: If using as a soil builder, chop it down with a weed-whacker right when it starts to flower but *before* it sets seed, then dig it into the dirt.

Culinary Uses:

- **Gluten-Free Flour:** Grind the triangular seeds into a dark, nutty flour for "Buckwheat Pancakes" or soba-style noodles.
- **Groats:** De-hulled seeds (kasha) can be boiled like rice or toasted for a crunchy salad topper.
- **Honey:** If you keep bees, Buckwheat produces a famous, dark, molasses-flavored honey that is highly prized.
- **Microgreens:** Young sprouts (at 7–10 days) are tender, tangy, excellent in sandwiches.

VEGETABLES

Arugula (*Eruca sativa*)

- **Type:** Annual
- **Ease of Growing:** Very Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Easy
- **Specialties:** Ultra-fast "Pioneer" crop, Pollinator favorite (if allowed to flower)

Plant Profile: Arugula is a leafy green with a signature peppery, nutty bite. In Northern BC, it is one of the first things you can eat from the garden. It is extremely cold-hardy and can even survive light spring snowfalls. However, it is "day-length sensitive"—once the days get long in June, the plant will quickly "bolt" (send up a tall flower stalk).

- **Timing:** Direct sow as soon as the soil can be worked (late April). Sow again every 3 weeks until early June. Start again in late August for a fall crop. Seeds germinate best between **4–12°C**.
- **Starting:** Sow **5mm deep**. Seeds germinate in as little as 4–8 days. Thin plants to **10cm** apart; overcrowded plants will bolt (go to seed) much faster.
- **Growing:** Thrives in cool, moist soil. In Zone 3, it grows best in full sun during the spring but appreciates afternoon shade during the heat of July to prevent bitterness.
- **Seed Saving:** Allow the plant to flower and produce long, thin pods. Wait until the pods turn brown and brittle on the stem. Snip the stems into a bag and crush them to release the small round seeds.

Culinary Uses:

- **Fresh Eating:** Use baby leaves in salads or as a spicy garnish for pizza and sandwiches.
- **Cooking:** Larger, older leaves can be lightly sautéed like spinach or blended into a "zesty" pesto.
- **Garnish:** The white/yellow flowers are edible and have a mild peppery flavor.

Bean – Bush (*Phaseolus vulgaris*)

- **Type:** Half-Hardy Annual
- **Ease of Growing:** Very Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Easy
- **Seed Life:** 3 years
- **Specialties:** Fast-maturing; no trellising required; "mechanical" harvest.

Plant Profile: Bush beans grow in compact, 12–24" mounds. They are the ideal choice for Zone 3 because they mature quickly and set their entire crop within a short window (usually 2 weeks). This allows you to harvest and clear the bed for a fall crop of kale or spinach.

- **Timing:** Direct sow in **late May or early June**. Beans hate cold, damp soil; if planted too early, the seeds will rot. Soil should be at least 16°C.
- **Starting:** Sow **2.5cm (1") deep**. Space seeds **5–8cm (2–3")** apart in rows **45–60cm (18–24")** apart.
- **Growing:** Do not transplant; beans have fragile roots and thrive when direct-seeded. Avoid touching or weeding the plants when the leaves are wet, as this spreads bean rust and other fungal diseases common in damp BC springs.
- **Seed Saving:** Extremely easy. Let the pods stay on the bush until they are brown, dry, and "crispy." If frost threatens before they are dry, pull the whole plant and hang it upside down indoors to finish.

Culinary Uses:

- **Fresh Eating:** Snap off the ends and steam or sauté briefly. Best harvested when the pods are the thickness of a pencil.
- **Blanching/Freezing:** Because they all ripen at once, bush beans are the best type for large-scale freezing for winter use.

Bean – Pole (*Phaseolus vulgaris* / *P. coccineus*)

- **Type:** Half-Hardy Annual
- **Ease of Growing:** Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Easy
- **Seed Life:** 3 years
- **Specialties:** Vertical space saver; continuous harvest until frost.

Plant Profile: Pole beans are vigorous climbers that can reach 2.5m (8') or more. Unlike bush beans, they produce a "steady trickle" of beans throughout the entire summer. They are highly ornamental, often featuring beautiful flowers (especially Scarlet Runners) that attract hummingbirds.

- **Timing:** Direct sow in **early June**. They need slightly warmer soil than bush beans to get a strong start.
- **Starting:** Sow **2.5cm (1") deep**. Plant in "hills" of 4–6 seeds around a central pole or space them **10cm (4")** apart along a fence or trellis.
- **Growing:** Provide a sturdy trellis *at the time of planting*. Once the vines find the support, they will "twin" themselves upward. Keep harvesting regularly; if you leave too many mature pods on the vine, the plant will stop producing new flowers.
- **Seed Saving:** Same as bush beans. Note that Scarlet Runners (*P. coccineus*) can cross-pollinate with other runners, but standard pole beans are usually self-pollinating and remain "true" to the parent.

Culinary Uses:

- **Gourmet Salads:** Pole beans are often more tender and "stringless" for longer periods than bush beans.
- **Fresh Snacking:** Great for kids to pick and eat raw directly from the trellis "teepee."

Bean – Drying / Shelling (*Phaseolus vulgaris*)

- **Type:** Half-Hardy Annual
- **Ease of Growing:** Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Very Easy
- **Seed Life:** 3–4 years
- **Specialties:** High protein storage crop; "pioneer" food.

Plant Profile: Drying beans can be either bush or pole varieties, but they are grown specifically for the mature seed inside rather than the green pod. Varieties like Kidney, Black, or Jacob's Cattle are allowed to stay on the plant until the very end of the season.

- **Timing:** Direct sow in **late May**. Because these need the full length of the summer to dry on the vine, they must be planted as early as the soil temperature allows.
- **Starting:** Sow **2.5cm (1") deep**. If growing a bush-type drying bean, space them slightly wider (**10–15cm**) to ensure maximum airflow for drying.
- **Growing:** Minimal care required. Once the pods begin to turn yellow in late August, stop watering the plants entirely. This encourages the plant to die back and the beans to harden.
- **Seed Saving:** This is the ultimate seed-saving crop because the harvest is the seed. Once the pods are "rattle-dry," shell the beans and store them in airtight jars.

Culinary Uses:

- **Winter Stews:** Soak overnight and simmer for hearty, home-grown chili or baked beans.
- **Shelling Stage:** Can be harvested while the seeds are still soft and green (the "shelling stage") and boiled briefly—a creamy, buttery treat rarely found in grocery stores.

Beet (*Beta vulgaris*)

- **Type:** Biennial (Grown as Annual)
- **Ease of Growing:** Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Moderate (Requires overwintering)
- **Specialties:** Two crops in one (Greens + Roots), Earth-building root crop

Plant Profile: Beets are incredibly rewarding in the North. They handle cool soil better than beans and can stay in the ground until a hard freeze. Beet "seeds" are actually clusters of 2–4 seeds, so thinning is always necessary. Varieties like Avalanche (white) or Chioggia (striped) offer beautiful novelty, while Cylindra is the king of uniform slicing.

- **Timing:** Direct sow **4 weeks before** the last frost (early May). For winter storage beets, sow a final crop in early July. Germination takes 5–12 days.
- **Starting:** Sow **1cm deep**. Thin seedlings to **10cm** apart once they are 5cm tall—ensure you pull the extras so the main root has room to expand.
- **Growing:** Beets need consistent moisture to stay tender. If roots have "black cankers," the soil may need Boron (a pinch of Borax in water can help). Mulching helps keep the root shoulders from sun-scald in the long June sun.
- **Seed Saving:** Beets flower in their second year. In Zone 3, dig up the best roots in fall, store them in a cool cellar in sand, and replant them the following spring to let them go to seed.

Culinary Uses:

- **Raw/Salad:** Sweet varieties (Avalanche) are excellent grated; Chioggia looks stunning sliced thin.
- **Roasting/Boiling:** Traditional red beets develop deep sweetness; use Cylindra for easy uniform slices.
- **Greens:** Sauté the leaves like spinach; they are rich in iron and vitamins.
- **Storage:** "Winterkeeper Lutz" stays sweet and firm in the fridge or cellar all winter.

Bok Choy (*Brassica rapa* var. *chinensis*)

- **Type:** Hardy Annual
- **Ease of Growing:** Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Easy
- **Specialties:** Fast-growing "superfood," Excellent for short seasons, Cold-tolerant.

Plant Profile: Bok Choy (also known as Pak Choi) is a staple of the cool-season garden. It produces thick, succulent white or green stalks with dark green, spoon-shaped leaves. In Zone 3, it is a perfect "early bird" or "late finisher" crop because it thrives in the long, cool spring days of May and June. Its rapid growth makes it ideal for gardeners who want a harvest within a month of planting.

- **Timing:** Direct sow as soon as the soil can be worked in **late April or early May**. For a fall harvest, sow again in **early August**. Bok Choy is very prone to "bolting" (flowering and becoming bitter) if it experiences the intense heat of a BC interior July, so focus on spring and fall crops.
- **Starting:** Sow **5mm–1cm deep**. Space or thin plants to **15–30cm** apart depending on whether you are growing "Baby" Bok Choy or full-sized heads.
- **Growing:** Full sun to partial shade. Bok Choy needs consistent moisture and fertile, nitrogen-rich soil to grow the thick, juicy stems it is known for. Use row covers (like the ones used for Cabbage) to protect the young leaves from flea beetles and cabbage moths, which are its primary pests in the North.
- **Seed Saving:** Being a member of the Brassica family, it will cross-pollinate with Turnips or Napa Cabbage. To save seeds, allow the plant to bolt in the heat. It will produce yellow flowers followed by thin green pods. Harvest the pods when they turn tan and brittle.

Culinary Uses:

- **Stir-fry:** The classic preparation; the stalks stay crunchy while the leaves wilt perfectly.
- **Grilling:** Slice small heads in half lengthwise, brush with oil and ginger, and sear on the grill.
- **Fresh:** Young, tender leaves can be used raw in salads as a nutrient-dense alternative to lettuce.

Broccoli (*Brassica oleracea*)

- **Type:** Annual / Biennial
- **Ease of Growing:** Easy (Needs pest protection)
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Moderate
- **Specialties:** High nutrient density, Cold-weather champion

Plant Profile: Broccoli thrives in the cool, bright summers of Northern BC. Garden varieties like Calabrese offer "side shoots"—smaller heads that grow after the main one is cut. Romanesco (Natalino) grows in a stunning chartreuse spiral, while Broccoli Raab (Rapini) is grown for its spicy, fast-maturing stems and buds.

- **Timing:** Start indoors in **late March**. Transplant outside in **mid-to-late May**. Broccoli does best when it matures in cool weather (June/July or September/October).
- **Starting:** Sow **5mm deep**. Give seedlings lots of light. Transplants should be moved to the garden once they have 6–8 true leaves. Space **45–60cm** apart.
- **Growing:** Heavy feeders! Mix composted manure and organic fertilizer into the soil. Push soil up around the stems as they grow to provide stability. Use row covers to prevent "Cabbage Moth" caterpillars.
- **Seed Saving:** Broccoli will cross-pollinate with any other flowering Brassica (Kale, Cabbage). For pure seeds, isolate varieties. Harvest pods when they turn brown and dry.

Culinary Uses:

- **Steaming/Fresh:** Standard heads (Calabrese) are classic for sides and veggie trays.
- **Gourmet:** Use Romanesco (Natalino) for its nutty flavor and beautiful fractal look in stir-fries.
- **Sautéing:** Rapini is best sautéed with garlic and lemon to balance its pleasant bitterness.
- **Freezing:** Blanch for 2 minutes and freeze to preserve your Northern harvest for winter.

Brussels Sprouts (*Brassica oleracea* var. *gemmifera*)

- **Type:** Hardy Biennial (Grown as Annual)
- **Ease of Growing:** Moderate
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Moderate (Biennial)
- **Specialties:** High-yield vertical crop, Frost-hardy winter vegetable

Plant Profile: Brussels sprouts are the "long-distance runners" of the garden. The 'Catskill' variety produces 2.5–5cm sprouts along a sturdy 60cm stalk. In Zone 3, these are highly valued because they actually taste better after a hard frost, which converts their starches into sugars. They require a long growing season (120 days), so starting early is non-negotiable.

- **Timing:** Start indoors in **early to mid-April**. In the North, you want the plant to be near full size by late August so the sprouts can mature during the cooling days of September.
- **Starting:** Sow **1cm deep** in pots. Use bright light to prevent leggy stems. Transplant outside in **late May**, spacing plants **45–60cm** apart.
- **Growing:** These are heavy feeders. Use humus-rich soil and composted manure. **Pro Tip:** To get all the sprouts on a stalk to ripen at the same time for a big harvest, pinch out the very top growing tip of the plant in late August.
- **Seed Saving:** Being biennial, the plant must survive the winter to flower the second year. In Zone 3, this usually requires digging the plant up and storing it in a root cellar, then replanting in spring.

Culinary Uses:

- **Roasting:** Slice in half and roast with oil for a nutty, caramelized flavor.
- **Steaming:** Traditional preparation; excellent with butter or a light glaze.
- **Spring Greens:** If the plant survives winter, the early spring flower stalks are tender and taste like sweet sprouting broccoli.

Cabbage (*Brassica oleracea var. capitata*)

- **Type:** Biennial (Grown as Annual)
- **Ease of Growing:** Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Moderate (Biennial)
- **Specialties:** Excellent storage potential, High Vitamin C

Plant Profile: Cabbages in the North fall into two categories: **Early** (like Early Jersey Wakefield) for summer eating, and **Late/Winter** (like Danish Ballhead or Kalibos) for storage and sauerkraut. 'Kalibos' is particularly prized for its stunning purple conical shape and high sugar content.

- **Timing:** Start indoors **5–6 weeks before the last frost** (late March to early April). Transplant in **mid-to-late May**.
- **Starting:** Sow **5mm deep**. Thin to the strongest seedling per pot. Space transplants **45–60cm** apart.
- **Growing:** Cabbages need consistent water. If the soil dries out and then gets a heavy rain, the heads may split. If you see a head starting to split, give the plant a sharp "twist" to break some roots and slow down its water intake. Use row covers to protect from cabbage moths.
- **Seed Saving:** Like Brussels sprouts, these must be overwintered in a frost-free cellar and replanted the following spring to produce seeds.

Culinary Uses:

- **Fermentation:** 'Danish Ballhead' is the gold standard for homemade sauerkraut.
- **Fresh Slaw:** 'Kalibos' and 'Early Jersey' are sweet and tender, perfect for raw salads.
- **Cooking:** Use pointed varieties for cabbage rolls or hearty winter stews.

Carrot (*Daucus carota*)

- **Type:** Biennial (Grown as Annual)
- **Ease of Growing:** Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Moderate
- **Specialties:** Root cellar staple, Kids' favorite

Plant Profile: Carrots love the long daylight hours of the BC interior. 'Nantes Coreless' is famous for its sweetness and ability to grow in heavier soils, while 'Berlicummer II' is a massive 10-inch carrot that is perfect for juicing and long-term storage.

- **Timing:** Direct sow from **early May** through July. In Zone 3, the soil must be moist for the full 14–21 days it takes for them to germinate.
- **Starting:** Sow very shallowly (**5mm deep**). **Pro Tip:** Place a board or a piece of burlap over the seeded row for the first 10 days to keep the moisture locked into the soil surface; remove it as soon as the first green "hairs" appear.
- **Growing:** Do not use fresh manure, or the carrots will "fork" (grow multiple legs). Thinning is mandatory—if they are crowded, they will stay spindly. Thin to **4–10cm** apart.
- **Seed Saving:** Do not plant near wild "Queen Anne's Lace," as they will cross-pollinate and produce bitter, woody roots. Overwinter the roots in sand and replant in spring.

Culinary Uses:

- **Juicing:** 'Berlicummer II' provides high yields of sweet, orange juice.
- **Fresh Snacking:** 'Nantes' is tender and coreless, ideal for eating raw straight from the garden.
- **Storage:** Carrots kept in a cool, dark place will stay crunchy until spring.

Cauliflower (*Brassica oleracea* var. *botrytis*)

- **Type:** Annual
- **Ease of Growing:** Moderate
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Moderate
- **Specialties:** Gourmet garden staple

Plant Profile: 'Amazing' lives up to its name by being more heat-tolerant than older varieties, though it still prefers the cool Northern nights. Cauliflower is more sensitive to "checks" in growth (like drought or cold snaps) than broccoli, so it needs steady care.

- **Timing:** Start indoors in **early April**. Transplant in **late May**.
- **Starting:** Sow **5mm deep**. Cauliflower hates root disturbance, so use compostable pots if possible.
- **Growing:** To keep the heads "snow white," you must perform **blanching**: when the head is the size of a tennis ball, pull the outer leaves up over the head and tie them with a rubber band to protect it from the sun.
- **Seed Saving:** Similar to other Brassicas; requires isolation from other flowering kales/cabbages.

Culinary Uses:

- **Roasting:** Toss florets with spices and oil for a "cauliflower steak" or popcorn-style snack.
- **Preserving:** Excellent for "Giardiniera" (pickled vegetable mix).

Celery (*Apium graveolens*)

- **Type:** Biennial (grown as Annual)
- **Ease of Growing:** Moderate
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Moderate
- **Specialties:** High-flavor aromatic

Plant Profile: 'Golden Self Blanching' is a European heirloom that doesn't require the labor-intensive "mounding" of soil that traditional celery needs. In Zone 3, celery needs the wettest, richest spot in your garden.

- **Timing:** Start indoors **very early** (late February or March). It can take 30 days just to sprout!
- **Starting:** Sow no more than **5mm deep**. Do not transplant outside until nights are reliably above **10°C**, or the plant may "bolt" (go to seed) immediately.
- **Growing:** Celery is a "marsh plant." It needs constant water and high nitrogen. If it dries out, the stalks will become stringy and hollow.
- **Seed Saving:** Seeds are easy to collect in the second year; they are highly aromatic and can be used in cooking.

Culinary Uses:

- **Base Aromatic:** Essential for the "holy trinity" (onions, carrots, celery) of soups and stews.
- **Fresh Eating:** Crisp, yellow-green stalks are perfect for snacking.

Cress (*Lepidium sativum*)

- **Type:** Annual
- **Ease of Growing:** Very Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Easy
- **Specialties:** "Micro-speed" crop; can be grown on a windowsill.

Plant Profile: Commonly known as Garden Cress or Peppergrass, this is one of the fastest vegetables you can grow. It has a sharp, tangy flavor similar to horseradish. In the North, it's a great "bridge" crop to grow indoors while waiting for the garden soil to thaw.

- **Timing:** Direct sow as soon as the soil can be worked in **late April**. For a continuous supply, sow a small patch every 10 days.
- **Starting:** Sow **3mm deep** or simply press into the soil surface. It germinates in just 2–4 days.
- **Growing:** Thrives in cool, moist conditions. In the heat of summer, it will bolt almost immediately, so keep it in the shade of taller plants like corn or pole beans.
- **Seed Saving:** Let the plant flower (small white blossoms). It will produce flat, circular seed pods. Once these turn tan and dry, snip the stems and shake the seeds into a container.

Culinary Uses:

- **Fresh:** Use as a "zesty" sprout in sandwiches, wraps, and egg dishes.

Garnish: Adds a peppery bite to soups and salads.

Cucumber (*Cucumis sativus*)

- **Type:** Tender Annual
- **Ease of Growing:** Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Easy
- **Specialties:** High-yield vine crop

Plant Profile: 'Marketmore 76' is a dependable "slicer" that also makes excellent pickles. It has shorter vines than many heirlooms, making it perfect for smaller Northern gardens or large containers.

- **Timing:** Do not rush these. Direct sow in **mid-June** or start indoors **3 weeks before** transplanting.
- **Starting:** Sow **2cm deep**. Use bottom heat (like a top of a fridge) to get them to sprout.
- **Growing:** Provide a trellis to keep fruits off the ground and improve air circulation. This prevents the "belly rot" that can happen in our damp Northern Augusts.
- **Seed Saving:** Allow a cucumber to grow until it is massive, yellow, and soft. Scoop out seeds, ferment them in water for 2 days, rinse, and dry.

Culinary Uses:

- **Fresh Slicing:** Crisp and sweet for salads.
- **Pickling:** Harvest small (5–10cm) for crunchy "dill pickles."

Kale (*Brassica oleracea* var. *viridis*)

- **Type:** Hardy Annual / Biennial
- **Ease of Growing:** Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Easy
- **Specialties:** The ultimate "winter-hardy" green; thrives in Northern frost.

Plant Profile: 'Red Russian' is a superstar for Zone 3. Unlike curly kales, its flat, oak-like leaves stay tender even when large. It is incredibly disease-resistant and actually becomes sweeter and more vibrant (turning deep purple-red) after the first few hard frosts of September.

- **Timing:** Direct sow in **early May** for summer eating, or in **July** for a fall/winter crop. For a head start, plant indoors 4–6 weeks before the last frost.
- **Starting:** Sow **5mm deep**. Thin seedlings to **45–60cm** apart. Overcrowding kale leads to smaller leaves and more pest issues.
- **Growing:** Kale loves fertile soil with consistent moisture. Add lime to your bed 3 weeks before planting to balance pH. It is very drought-tolerant once established, but the flavor is best when the plant is never stressed for water.
- **Seed Saving:** Kale is a biennial that flowers in its second year. In Northern BC, 'Red Russian' often survives the winter under a thick blanket of snow. In spring, it will send up tall yellow flower towers. Collect the dried pods before they shatter.

Culinary Uses:

- **Salads:** Use young "baby" leaves for tender, raw salads.
- **Braising:** Large leaves are excellent sautéed with garlic or added to hearty winter soups.
- **Kale Chips:** Toss with oil and salt and bake until crispy—a Northern garden classic.

Leek (*Allium ampeloprasum*)

- **Type:** Hardy Biennial (Grown as Annual)
- **Ease of Growing:** Moderate
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Moderate (Biennial)
- **Specialties:** Extremely frost-hardy; can be harvested from under the snow.

Plant Profile: Leeks are the "patient" members of the onion family. They require a long growing season but are incredibly rewarding because they are virtually pest-free in the North. Unlike onions, they do not form a bulb, but rather a long, white, succulent cylinder of leaves.

- **Timing:** Start indoors **very early** (late February or March). Transplant outside in **mid-to-late May**.
- **Starting:** Sow **5mm deep** in flats. They look like blades of grass at first. When they reach the thickness of a pencil, transplant them into the garden.
- **Growing: The Trench Method:** Dig a trench 15cm deep. Plant the leeks at the bottom. As they grow, gradually fill the trench with soil. This "blanches" the stem, keeping it white and tender.
- **Seed Saving:** Leeks flower in their second year. In Zone 3, you must mulch them heavily with straw to help them survive the winter, or move them to a cellar and replant in spring.

Culinary Uses:

- **Soups:** The essential ingredient for Potato Leek soup (Vichyssoise).

Braising: Slow-cook in butter or stock for a melt-in-your-mouth side dish.

Lettuce (*Lactuca sativa*)

- **Type:** Annual
- **Ease of Growing:** Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Easy
- **Specialties:** Fast-growing, high-turnover crop; many varieties are "cut-and-come-again."

Plant Profile: Lettuce is a cool-weather specialist. 'Darkness' provides deep red color, 'Freckles' offers a beautiful maroon-spotted romaine leaf, and 'Red Deer Tongue' is a rugged, nutty-flavored heirloom that was a staple for pioneers because it is slow to bolt in the long June sun.

- **Timing:** Sow every 2–3 weeks from **early May** to **August**. Lettuce seeds go dormant if the soil is over 22°C; in hot July weeks, pre-sprout seeds in the fridge on a damp paper towel.
- **Starting:** Sow **5mm deep** or just on the surface (they need a little light to sprout). Thin leaf lettuce to **20cm** and heading lettuce to **30cm**.
- **Growing:** Lettuce has shallow roots and needs frequent, light watering. If it gets too dry, the leaves turn bitter instantly. Partial shade is beneficial during the "Heat of July" to prevent bolting.
- **Seed Saving:** Let the plant "bolt" into a tall stalk with small dandelion-like flowers. Once they turn into fluffy white "feathers," shake the seeds into a brown paper bag.

Culinary Uses:

- **Gourmet Salads:** Mix 'Darkness' and 'Freckles' for a restaurant-quality visual contrast.
- **Wraps:** Use the sturdy, triangular leaves of 'Red Deer Tongue' or 'Freckles' as a gluten-free taco or sandwich wrap.

Onion (*Allium cepa*)

- **Type:** Biennial (Grown as Annual)
- **Ease of Growing:** Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Moderate
- **Specialties:** Kitchen staple; essential for long-term storage.

Plant Profile: For Zone 3, "Long Day" varieties are required because onions use the 16+ hours of Northern summer sunlight to trigger bulb formation. You can grow them from "sets" (tiny bulbs) for ease, or from seed for better storage quality.

- **Timing:** Start seeds indoors in **early March**. If using sets, plant them directly in **early May**.
- **Starting:** Sow seeds **5mm–1cm deep**. When transplanting, do not bury them too deep; the bulb should sit right at the soil surface.
- **Growing:** Keep them well-weeded! Onions have shallow roots and hate competing with weeds. When the tops turn yellow and fall over in late August, stop watering to allow the skins to dry.
- **Seed Saving:** Similar to leeks, onions flower in year two. Ensure you save "Long Day" varieties to maintain the genetics that thrive in Northern light.

Culinary Uses:

- **Fresh:** Use "thinings" as green onions in early summer.

Storage: Cure (dry) in a warm, airy place for 2 weeks until the necks are tight and dry for winter use.

Peas (*Pisum sativum*)

- **Type:** Hardy Annual
- **Ease of Growing:** Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Easy
- **Specialties:** Early spring nitrogen-fixer; excellent for kids' "snack gardens."

Plant Profile: Peas are the first "treat" of the Northern spring. We have three types: **Shelling** (Bounty, Green Arrow, Strike), **Snow** (Dwarf Snow Pea), and **Snap** (Sugar Ann). 'Sugar Ann' and 'Strike' are particularly valued in the North because they are extra early and don't require tall, complex trellising.

- **Timing:** Plant as soon as the soil can be worked in **late April or early May**. Peas love the cool, damp Northern spring.
- **Starting:** Sow **2cm deep** early in the season, or **5cm deep** if the weather has warmed up. Do not thin peas; they like to grow in a dense "hedge."
- **Growing:** Avoid high-nitrogen fertilizers (which cause all leaves and no peas). Instead, use bone meal or rock phosphate. Even "dwarf" varieties appreciate a few twigs or a short string trellis to keep them off the damp ground.
- **Seed Saving:** Leave a few pods on the vine until they turn brown, thin, and the peas inside feel like hard pebbles. Store in a cool, dry place.

Culinary Uses:

- **Fresh Snacking:** Snap peas (Sugar Ann) are meant to be eaten pod-and-all.
- **Stir-fry:** Snow peas are the classic choice for quick high-heat cooking.
- **Preserving:** 'Early Freezer' and 'Green Arrow' are the best varieties for blanching and freezing for winter use.

Pepper (*Capsicum annuum*)

- **Type:** Tender Annual
- **Ease of Growing:** Moderate (Needs significant heat)
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Easy
- **Specialties:** High-value greenhouse or "hot-spot" crop.

Plant Profile: Peppers are a challenge in Zone 3 but highly rewarding. 'California Wonder' is the standard for big, sweet bells, while 'Ring of Fire' is a cayenne that is specifically bred to mature quickly in shorter Northern seasons.

- **Timing:** Start indoors **very early** (March). They need a long head start. Do not transplant outside until nights are consistently above **12°C** (usually mid-June).
- **Starting:** Sow **5mm–1cm deep**. Use a heat mat—peppers will sit in cold soil for weeks without sprouting.
- **Growing:** In the North, peppers grow best in **black containers** or in a **greenhouse**. If planting in the ground, use clear plastic mulch to trap heat in the soil. Pinch off the first few flowers to encourage the plant to grow bigger before it starts focusing on fruit.
- **Seed Saving:** Allow the pepper to fully ripen to its final color (red). Scrape the seeds out, rinse, and dry thoroughly.

Culinary Uses:

- **Fresh:** 'California Wonder' is the ultimate stuffing pepper or salad crunch.
- **Drying:** 'Ring of Fire' cayennes are perfect for stringing up to dry, then grinding into homemade red pepper flakes.
- **Roasting:** Thick-walled bells are excellent charred over a flame and peeled.

Radish (*Raphanus sativus*)

- **Type:** Annual (Vegetable)
- **Ease of Growing:** Very Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Moderate
- **Specialties:** The "Flash" of the garden; provides a harvest in as little as 25 days.

Plant Profile: Radishes are the perfect "confidence booster" for new gardeners. They are incredibly fast-growing and take up very little space, making them ideal for inter-planting between slower crops like carrots or parsnips. In Zone 3, they thrive in the cool spring and autumn air, offering a crisp, peppery crunch before the summer heat arrives.

Timing: Direct sow as soon as the soil can be worked in April. For a continuous harvest, sow a small new batch every 10 days until early June.

Starting: Sow 1/2 inch deep and about 1 inch apart. They do not like being transplanted, so always sow them exactly where they are meant to grow.

Growing: Full sun to partial shade. The secret to a "mild" radish is speed and water—keep the soil consistently moist. If the soil dries out or the weather gets too hot, the radishes will become woody and overwhelmingly spicy.

Seed Saving: To save seeds, you **cannot** harvest the root. You must leave a few plants in the ground. The root will grow a tall stalk (up to 3 feet) covered in small pink or white flowers. These flowers turn into green, bean-like pods. Wait for the pods to turn brown and "crispy" on the plant.

Important: Radish pods do not "shatter" (open) easily; you will need to crush the dried pods to get the round, reddish-brown seeds out.

Culinary/Garden Uses:

- **Edible Pods:** If you don't want to wait for seeds, you can eat the young green pods—they taste like a crunchy, peppery green bean!
- **Soil Breaker:** Their quick-growing roots help loosen heavy soil, making it easier for following crops to grow.

Spinach (*Spinacia oleracea*)

- **Type:** Annual (Vegetable)
- **Ease of Growing:** Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Moderate
- **Specialties:** High-nutrient greens; extremely cold-tolerant (perfect for Zone 3).

Plant Profile: Spinach is a cool-weather superstar. In British Columbia and other northern climates, it thrives in the chilly dampness of early spring and late autumn. It is much hardier than lettuce and can often survive a light frost without any protection. The key to spinach is catching it before the long days of summer arrive, which triggers the plant to "bolt" (send up a flower stalk and turn bitter).

Timing: Direct sow as soon as the soil can be worked in April. For a second harvest, sow again in mid-August for "fall greens."

Starting: Sow 1/2 inch deep. Spinach seeds have a hard outer coat and prefer cool soil to germinate; if the soil is too warm (above 20°C), they may refuse to sprout.

Growing: Full sun to partial shade. Keep the soil moist and mulch around the base to keep the roots cool. If you see the center of the plant start to stretch upward into a point, harvest the whole plant immediately—this is the sign that it's about to bolt.

Seed Saving: Spinach is "dioecious," meaning you have separate male and female plants. To get seeds, you must leave a patch of at least 6–10 plants to ensure pollination (which happens via wind). Allow the plants to bolt and turn yellow/brown. The seeds will form in clusters along the stem. Wait until the seeds are dry and hard before stripping them off the stalk.

Note: Wear gloves, as some varieties have seeds with small, sharp "spines."

Culinary/Garden Uses:

- **Continuous Harvest:** Use the "cut and come again" method by harvesting only the outer leaves, allowing the center to keep growing.
- **Early Blooms:** Because it's so cold-hardy, it's often the very first fresh food you can eat from your garden in the spring.

Squash - Winter (*Cucurbita maxima* / *C. pepo*)

- **Type:** Tender Annual
- **Ease of Growing:** Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Moderate (Highly prone to cross-pollination)
- **Seed Life:** 4 years
- **Specialties:** Long-term storage champions; high-density nutrition for winter.

Plant Profile: Winter squash are aggressive, sprawling vines that require significant space but reward the gardener with heavy, nutrient-dense fruits. Unlike summer squash, these are harvested only when fully mature and the rind is hard enough to resist a fingernail. In Zone 3, they are a race against the clock; they need the hottest spot in the garden to reach maturity before the September frost.

Timing: Start indoors **3 weeks before the last frost** (typically mid-May). Because squash roots are extremely sensitive, do not start them earlier than this; a "leggy" or root-bound squash plant will never thrive. Transplant outside in **mid-June** once the soil is warm to the touch.

Starting: Sow **2cm (1") deep** in large (4-inch) biodegradable pots or soil blocks to minimize root disturbance. If direct sowing, wait until June and plant 3 seeds per "hill" (mound), thinning to the strongest plant. Space hills **2m (6')** apart.

Growing Information: Full sun is mandatory. Squash are "heavy feeders"—mix a shovelful of compost or aged manure into each planting hole. In Northern BC, use black plastic mulch or dark landscape fabric to trap heat in the soil. To ensure the fruit ripens in our short season, **pinch off the growing tips** of the vines in mid-August; this forces the plant to stop growing new leaves and put all its energy into maturing the existing squash.

Seed Saving: Squash are notorious for cross-pollinating. If you grow Acorn, Delicata, and Turban together, the seeds will likely produce "mystery hybrids" next year. To save pure seeds, you must hand-pollinate the flowers and tape them shut to prevent bees from bringing in outside pollen. Harvest seeds from fully cured, mature squash.

Culinary Uses:

- **Roasting:** Slice **Delicata** into rings or **Acorn** into wedges and roast with syrup/butter.
- **Soups & Purées:** The thick, dry flesh of the **Turban** squash is ideal for silky autumn soups or as a nutrient-dense substitute for mashed potatoes.
- **Edible Bowls:** The hollow center of Acorn and Turban squash makes them perfect for stuffing with wild rice, sausage, or cranberries.

Swiss Chard (*Beta vulgaris var. cicla*)

- **Type:** Hardy Biennial (Grown as Annual)
- **Ease of Growing:** Very Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Moderate
- **Specialties:** "Cut-and-come-again" convenience; ornamental and edible.

Plant Profile: Chard is essentially a beet grown for its leaves rather than its root. It is one of the most productive plants in the garden—one row can feed a family all summer. Varieties like "Bright Lights" add stunning neon colors (pink, yellow, orange) to the garden.

- **Timing:** Direct sow in **early May**. It is much more heat-tolerant than spinach and won't bolt as easily in the July sun.
- **Starting:** Sow **1cm deep**. Like beets, each "seed" is a cluster, so you must thin the seedlings to **20–30cm** apart.
- **Growing:** Very low maintenance. Simply snap off the outer leaves as you need them, and the plant will keep producing from the center until a heavy freeze.
- **Seed Saving:** Chard will cross-pollinate with Beets. It requires overwintering to flower in the second year.

Culinary Uses:

- **Sautéed:** The leaves are a perfect substitute for spinach.
- **Stalks:** The thick, crunchy mid-ribs can be grilled or pickled like asparagus.

Tomato – Beefsteak (*Solanum lycopersicum*)

- **Type:** Tender Annual (Indeterminate)
- **Ease of Growing:** Moderate (Needs a long season)
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Easy
- **Specialties:** Massive, meaty fruits; the ultimate "sandwich" tomato.

Plant Profile: Beefsteak tomatoes produce the largest fruits in the garden, often weighing over 1 lb. Because they take the longest to mature (80–90 days), they require the most care in Zone 3. They are "Indeterminate," meaning the vines will keep growing until the frost kills them, so they require sturdy staking.

- **Timing:** Start indoors **6–8 weeks before the last frost** (mid-March). Do not transplant outdoors until night temperatures are consistently above **10°C** (mid-to-late June).
- **Starting:** Sow **5mm deep**. Use a heat mat for germination. Once seedlings have two sets of true leaves, transplant them into larger 4-inch pots and bury the stem up to the first leaves to encourage a massive root system.
- **Growing:** Full sun (the hottest spot you have). Beefsteaks need heavy pruning; remove the "suckers" (small shoots in the crotch of the branches) so the plant puts its energy into ripening fruit rather than growing leaves.
- **Seed Saving:** Choose the most perfect, fully ripe fruit. Squeeze the seeds and gel into a jar with a little water. Let it ferment for 3 days until a film forms, then rinse and dry.

Culinary Uses:

- **Sandwiches & Burgers:** Their massive diameter makes them the classic "one-slice-per-sandwich" choice.
- **Fresh Slabs:** Best served as "Tomato Steaks" with just a drizzle of oil, balsamic, and salt to highlight the meaty texture.
- **Stuffing:** Their size and sturdiness make them excellent for hollowed-out "stuffed tomato" recipes.

Tomato – Cherry (*Solanum lycopersicum*)

- **Type:** Tender Annual (Indeterminate or Determinate)
- **Ease of Growing:** Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Easy
- **Specialties:** Highest sugar content; earliest to ripen; kids' favorite.

Plant Profile: Cherry tomatoes are the most reliable choice for the North. Because the fruits are small, they ripen much faster than larger varieties. They are prolific producers and often continue ripening even as the weather begins to cool in late August.

- **Timing:** Start indoors **6 weeks before the last frost**. Cherry tomatoes are slightly more vigorous and can handle transplanting better than beefsteaks.
- **Starting:** Same as Beefsteaks. If growing in hanging baskets, look for "determinate" or "tumbling" varieties that don't need a trellis.
- **Growing:** Full sun. Cherry tomatoes are prone to "splitting" if they get a sudden heavy rain after a dry spell. Keep soil moisture consistent. They generally require less pruning than beefsteaks, but thinning the leaves in August helps the sun reach the inner clusters.
- **Seed Saving:** Same fermentation process as Beefsteaks. **Note:** If you grow different types of cherry tomatoes close together, they may cross-pollinate.

Culinary Uses:

- **Fresh Snacking:** High sugar content makes them the perfect "garden candy" eaten straight off the vine.
- **Salads:** Ideal for tossing whole into green salads or halving for pasta salads.
- **Roasting:** Excellent when roasted whole with garlic and herbs until they "burst," creating a natural, chunky pasta sauce.

Tomato – Slicer / Globe (*Solanum lycopersicum*)

- **Type:** Tender Annual (Usually Determinate)
- **Ease of Growing:** Easy to Moderate
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Easy
- **Specialties:** Perfectly round fruits; uniform ripening; great for canning.

Plant Profile: Slicers are the "all-purpose" tomato. They are usually "Determinate" (bush-style), meaning they grow to a certain height, set all their fruit at once, and then stop. This is perfect for Zone 3 because you get a concentrated harvest before the cold weather hits.

- **Timing:** Start indoors **6–7 weeks before the last frost**.
- **Starting:** Same as other tomatoes. Ensure they get plenty of light to prevent "leggy" (stretched) stems.
- **Growing:** Full sun. Since bush tomatoes set so much fruit at once, the branches can get heavy and snap; use a standard tomato cage for support. Do not prune determinate varieties heavily, as you might accidentally cut off your entire harvest.
- **Seed Saving:** Same fermentation process. Slicers are excellent for seed saving as they are often very stable heirloom varieties.

Culinary Uses:

- **Canning & Preserves:** The uniform size and high juice content make them the industry standard for canning whole tomatoes or making salsa.
- **Sauces:** They break down easily and consistently, perfect for smooth marinara or tomato soup.
- **General Slicing:** The go-to tomato for wedges in salads or standard kitchen prep where a medium, round fruit is needed.

Zucchini (*Cucurbita pepo*)

- **Type:** Tender Annual
- **Ease of Growing:** Very Easy
- **Ease of Seed Saving:** Moderate (Prone to cross-pollination)
- **Seed Life:** 4 years
- **Specialties:** High-yield "garden workhorse"; fast-growing; edible flowers.

Plant Profile: Zucchini is a prolific producer that grows in a "bush" habit rather than the long, trailing vines of winter squash. This makes it a great choice for smaller garden beds or large containers. In Zone 3, it is incredibly reliable because it produces fruit quickly—often within 45 to 55 days—ensuring a massive harvest even in a short summer.

- **Timing:** Start indoors **3 weeks before the last frost** (mid-May) or direct sow in **early June** once the soil is warm. Like all squash, it is extremely frost-sensitive.
- **Starting:** Sow **2cm (1") deep**. If starting indoors, use large biodegradable pots to avoid disturbing the sensitive taproot during transplanting. Space plants **60–90cm (2–3')** apart to allow for airflow, which helps prevent powdery mildew.
- **Growing Information:** Full sun and rich, fertile soil are key. Zucchini are thirsty plants; water at the base of the plant rather than over the leaves to keep the foliage dry. If your plant is producing flowers but no fruit, it may be a lack of pollinators—you can hand-pollinate by rubbing the yellow pollen from a male flower (straight stem) into the center of a female flower (which has a tiny zucchini at the base).
- **Seed Saving:** Zucchini will cross-pollinate with other *Cucurbita pepo* varieties, including Acorn squash and Delicata. To save pure seeds, hand-pollination is required. Unlike the fruit we eat, seeds must be harvested from a "marrow"—a zucchini that has been left on the vine until it is massive, hard-skinned, and has turned yellow or orange.

Culinary Uses:

- **Fresh & Sautéed:** Best harvested when small (15–20cm) for the sweetest flavor and tender skin. Sauté with garlic, lemon, and herbs.
- **Baking:** Grate oversized zucchinis (peel and de-seed first) to add moisture to "Zucchini Bread," muffins, or chocolate cakes.
- **Fritters:** Grate and squeeze out excess moisture to make crispy, pan-fried garden fritters.
- **Edible Flowers:** The large male blossoms can be stuffed with ricotta cheese and lightly fried for a gourmet summer treat.