

Phenology & Planting

What is Phenology?

Phenology is the study of cyclic and seasonal natural phenomena, especially in relation to climate and plant and animal life. For the purposes of this article we will be focused on indicator plants or plants that determine when certain seasons “start” and what can be planted.

What are the Seasons?

We’ve all heard of Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter.

Phenology breaks this down into 10 seasons: early, mid, late Spring; early, mid, late Summer; early, mid, late Fall; and Winter.

Why does this matter?

This all matters because if we watch when these seasons are happening, we know when we can plant certain flowers, vegetables, shrubs, trees, etc. according to nature and not a calendar.

What is the breakdown?

- Early Spring when Hazelbrush catkins and Osoberry bloom,
- mid spring with Forsythia blooms,
- late spring with apple and lilac blooms,
- early summer with black elderberry blooms,
- mid summer lavender blooms,
- late summer crabapples start to ripen,
- early autumn black elderberry are ripe,
- mid autumn walnut and oak acorns are falling,
- late autumn oak and maple leaves turn color,
- winter everything is dormant.

What to plant?

I created a Phenology Planting Guide for the Molalla, OR area. Times will likely be different, even within different microclimates, elevations, etc., within Molalla or anywhere that has these plants growing. It's still a fairly accurate guide if you just pay attention to the actual phenology/nature and not the calendar!

Conclusion

Rather than following a strict moon phase planting, I am thinking of following phenology more and see how it goes!

Phenology Planting Guide – Molalla, OR

As many of you may remember, I used to break all this information down into moon-phase gardening. However, since there is no scientific basis for this, I switched to using phenology—tracking seasons based on indicator plants blooming or fruiting—and phenological folklore from the past, which is still highly relevant today!

Keep in mind that dates in the 'Approximate Time Frame' will always shift. You'll need to observe Mother Nature closely to catch the perfect window! If you start your seeds indoors earlier than expected, be sure to calculate your transplant dates so they don't become root-bound in their pots.

I've included the actual dates from 2026 to reflect this year's unusually wild weather patterns.

Mid-Late February (happened Feb 19, 2026)

Osoberry (Indian Plum) begins to bloom. *First shrub to bloom after winter.*

Start Seed Indoors: Cabbage, Broccoli, Kale, Cauliflower, Onions, Leeks, Chives, Oregano, Thyme, Sage, Pansy, Viola, Echinacea, Rudbeckia, Delphinium (<i>Requires 2 weeks of cold stratification before sowing</i>)	Plant Bare-Root: Ornamental trees/shrubs, Fruit Trees, Cane Berries, Strawberries (<i>Pinch off all flowers during the first summer to force the plant to build massive roots instead of early berries.</i>) <i>Keep roots soaking in a bucket of water until the exact second they go into the ground, but no more than 12-24 hours.</i>	Transplant: Primrose
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Early-Mid March (happened March 8, 2026)

Forsythia begins to bloom.

Start Seed Outdoors: Poppies, Sweet Peas, Larkspur*, Bachelor's Buttons, Chervil, Endive, Escarole, Leek, Cilantro, Parsley, Parsnip, Radish, Salsify, Lettuce, Peas, Spinach, Onion (sets, seed)** <i>*Refrigerate Larkspur seeds for 2 weeks before sowing outdoor.</i> <i>**For bigger onions, plant from seed not sets.</i>	Plant Bare-Root: Rhubarb (crowns)***, Asparagus (crowns)**** <i>***Rhubarb don't harvest first year.</i> <i>****Asparagus don't harvest for 2 years.</i>
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Early-Mid March *about a week after Forsythia starts to bloom typically* (happened March 8, 2026)
When Flowering Quince, Grape Hyacinth, and Narcissus are in full bloom. Lilac are just starting to leaf.

Start Seed Indoors: Tomatoes, Tomatillos, Peppers, Eggplant	Plant Bare-Root: Hostas, Bleeding Hearts, Astilbe
Start Seed Outdoors: Alyssum, Calendula, Borage (see below for companion planting with tomatoes), Dill, Swiss Chard, Turnip, Carrots, Kohlrabi, Collard Greens, Broad Bean, Corn Salad, Fennel (Bulb), Potatoes (seed)	Transplant: Snapdragons, Foxglove, & Canterbury Bells, Pansy, Viola, Echinacea, Rudbeckia, Delphinium, Rosemary, Mint, Thyme, Sage, Chives, Onions, Leeks, Cauliflower, Cabbage, Broccoli, Kale, Celery, Celeriac, Peas, Strawberry seedlings*, Rhubarb seedlings **. <i>*Strawberries pinch off all flowers during the first summer to force the plant to build massive roots instead of early berries.</i> <i>**Rhubarb don't harvest first 2 years when grown this way. Gently harden off seedlings for a few days before planting so they aren't shocked by the outdoor air.</i>

Late April, Early May (happened April 11, 2026 – early)
When Flowering Crabapples and Lilacs are in full bloom.

Start Seed Indoors: All Melons and Squash incl. Cucumbers, Pumpkins, Zucchini, Watermelon, etc. <i>Start Seed Indoors in biodegradable or large pots (you do not wish to disturb roots when transplanting).</i>	Transplant: Fuchsia, Asparagus seedlings <i>Protect Fuchsia from frost. Asparagus don't harvest for 3 years when grown this way.</i>	Harvest begins: Spinach, Lettuce, Endive, Escarole, Chervil, Cilantro, Parsely, Corn Salad, Radishes (<i>Check them the moment you see the leafy green tops reach about 6 inches tall</i>)
Start Seed Outdoors: Cosmos, Zinnias, Amaranth, Celosia, Sunflowers, Marigolds, Nasturtium, New Zealand Spinach	Plant Bulbs: Dahlias, Gladiolus, & Canna Lilies	

Early-Mid May *about 2 weeks after full bloom* (happened Late April 2026 – early)
Lilac blooms begin to fade and Apple blossoms fall.

Start Seed Outdoors: Soybean, Bush Lima Bean, Squash, Melons, Cucumbers, Bush/Pole Beans, Corn	Harvest begins: Dill leaves
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Mid-Late May (happened May 10, 2026 – early)

When Irises, Peonies and Black Locust in full bloom.

Start Seed Outdoors: Borage <i>(if companion planting with Tomatoes)</i>	Transplant: Geraniums, Petunias, Marigolds, Nasturtiums, Basil, Eggplant, Peppers, Tomatillo, Tomatoes, Melons, Squash, Sweet Potato, Okra, Pole Lima Beans <i>Watch weather and protect from cold temps</i>	Harvest begins: Dill flowers, Kohlrabi
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Late May through June

When Mock Orange is in full bloom.

Start Seed Indoors for Fall Harvest: Kale, Broccoli, Cauliflower, Brussels Sprouts	Start Seed Outdoors for Fall Harvest: Carrots, Parsnips, Fennel (bulb), Rutabaga, Swiss Chard, Collard Greens, Cabbage <i>Use floating row covers immediately over outdoor brassica seeds to block pests.</i>	Harvest begins: Apricots, Honeyberries, Strawberries, Salmonberries, Thimbleberries, Hardneck Garlic scapes, Peas, Swiss Chard through summer, Collard Greens through summer, Cabbage, Broccoli (<i>monitor the buds daily to catch them while they are perfectly dense</i>), Cauliflower (<i>heads the moment they reach 6 to 8 inches and are perfectly tight</i>), Carrots through summer (<i>reach peak sweetness when the foliage hits 12+ inches tall and the root shoulders poking out of the soil are 3/4 to 1 inch thick</i>)
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Late June – Early July (on track 2026)

Daylilies, Ocean Spray blooming. Himalayan blackberries starting to form green berries after blooms fade.

Harvest begins: Sweet Cherries, early Plums, Mulberries, Juneberries, Currants, Gooseberries, early Blueberries, Red Huckleberries, Blue Elderflowers, Bush Beans, Cucumbers, Summer Squash, Garlic bulbs (*bottom 2 to 3 leaves turn completely brown and paper-dry.*), Onion bulbs (*Let them sit in the dry soil for 7 to 10 days until roughly 50% to 80% of the patch has flopped over.*) Pie Cherries and Plums are close behind.

Late-July/Early August (on track 2026)

Himalayan blackberries starting to turn red.

Harvest begins: Early Sweet Corn, Pole Beans, new Potatoes, Beets, early Peaches, Japanese Plums, early European Plums, early Apples, early European Pears, Summer Raspberries, Evergreen Huckleberries, Red Elderberries

Mid-Late August (on track 2026)

When Himalayan Blackberries are in peak fruit.

Transplant: Kale, Broccoli, Cauliflower, Brussels Sprout
Provide temporary shade cloth or leafy branch covers for newly transplanted brassicas for the first 3-5 days to prevent heat scorch.

Harvest Begins: Cherry Tomatoes, Eggplant, Peppers, Tomatillos, Melons (*look for that creamy yellow under-belly*), Peaches, Asian Pears, European Pears, Apples, Italian Prunes, European Plums, Figs

Late August/Early September (seems to be on track)

Pacific Crabapples ripening.

Start Seed Outdoors: Radish, Arugula, Spinach, Mustard Greens, Lettuce, Cilantro, Parsley, Foxgloves, Hollyhock, Money Plant, Primrose (shady location).	Harvest begins: Corn, Slicing Tomatoes, Potatoes (<i>look for green growth to die off, stop watering once growth turns yellow, harvest after a couple weeks</i>), Pawpaws
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Mid September – Early October

When Acorns are beginning to fall.

Start Seed Outdoors: Cover Crops like Crimson Clover, Winter Field Peas, or Hairy Vetch	Harvest begins: Blue Elderberries, Hazlenuts, Quince, Autumn Olive
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Late September – Mid October

When native Oaks and Hazelnuts begin a heavy drop of their acorns/nuts.

Start Bulbs/Cloves Outdoors: Garlic, Shallot, Alliums, Crocus, Daffodil, Muscari	Harvest begins: Fennel, Winter Squash, Pumpkins (<i>start checking the woodiness of your squash stems</i>)
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Late October – Mid November

When the first frost kills summer annuals.

Start Bulbs Outdoors: Tulips	Harvest begins: Salsify, Fall Broccoli (<i>monitor the buds daily to catch them while they are perfectly dense</i>), Fall Cauliflower (<i>when it is 6 to 8 inches wide, compact, smooth, and tight</i>), Medlars, Highbush Cranberries, Persimmon, Rose hips
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Late November – Early February

Leaves are gone, all is dormant.

Harvest begins: Jerusalem Artichokes (Sunchokes), Fall Brussels Sprouts (*Harvest individual sprouts when they are 1 to 1.5 inches wide and feel rock-hard when squeezed*), scion-wood (*this is the prime window to clip dormant, pencil-thick twigs from your apples, pears, plums, and cherries. You store these cuttings in the refrigerator to graft onto new rootstocks in the spring*)

Protect Tools: Drain hoses, turn off outdoor spigots, and oil hand tools.

Mulch Empty Beds: Cover any bare soil with leaves or straw to prevent winter rains from washing away nutrients.

Order Seeds: Use January to plan layouts and secure seeds before the spring rush begins.

REST!!!