

# ZONE 8 GARDEN Plans



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# Homestead Academy of Practical Skills ROADMAP

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# **ZONE 8**

## Garden Plans

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# **ZONE 8 GARDEN**

## Plans

SAMPLE

# Contents

Welcome to Food Prep Guide .....	7
Understanding Zone 8.....	8
How to Use This Guide .....	10
Monthly Action Plans .....	11
Sample Layouts .....	48
Reference Charts .....	52
Staples Garden Plan .....	53
Seed Starting Yearly Overview .....	56
Companion Planting Chart .....	60
Video Tutorials .....	66

# Welcome to Food Prep Guide!

We are a team of women who are passionate about preserving old-world skills and passing them on to the next generation.

As fellow gardeners, we know the satisfaction of growing your own food and the value of putting nutritious, homegrown produce on your family's table.

The information in this guide was written with Zone 8's unique conditions in mind: the mild winters, the early spring planting, the long summer heat, and the generous fall growing window.



—*Stacy & Jordan*

We also know you're likely juggling work, family meals, and everything else life throws your way. This guide works **WITH** your busy life—giving you clear monthly priorities, quick-reference charts, and practical planting schedules.

If you're new to our brand, you should know that three words characterize how we teach, and we believe they communicate what you can expect from all of our resources:

**FAITHFUL:** God can multiply our efforts like He did the widow's oil and wheat (1 Kings 17). Our trust in Jesus shapes everything we do here.

**FRUGAL:** True frugality means making thoughtful choices that honor our resources. We focus on strategies that maximize production while minimizing waste.

**EFFICIENT:** Time is limited—and so is brain space. We strive to share efficient management systems alongside every skill we teach.

We're glad you're here—let's get started!

# UNDERSTANDING ZONE 8

If you're new to gardening in Zone 8, you're working with one of the longest growing seasons in the continental United States. Your winters are short and mild, your springs arrive early, and you have a true fall garden that stretches well into November.

The trade-off is summer—hot, humid, and relentless—but with good planning, you can work around it and harvest abundantly all year long.

Zone 8 is defined by average minimum winter temperatures ranging from 10°F to 20°F, with a growing season of approximately 200–250 days. That long window gives you time for a full warm-season garden, a productive fall garden, and in mild winters, cool-season crops that grow with little to no protection.

Cool-season crops like lettuce, spinach, peas, kale, and brassicas thrive in spring and fall. Hardy greens like collards and Swiss chard can often be harvested for months without a cold frame. Summer is where Zone 8 demands the most planning—heat arrives early and stays long, so spring crops need to finish before temperatures peak.

The upside is that heat-loving crops like okra, sweet potatoes, Southern peas, watermelon, and peppers absolutely thrive here.

## Zone 8a vs. Zone 8b

Zone 8a is defined by minimum winter temperatures of 10°F to 15°F. Zone 8b has minimum temperatures that range from 15°F to 20°F.

This five-degree difference translates into roughly 2–3 weeks' disparity in spring planting times. Zone 8a gardeners will typically wait until mid-April before safely planting frost-tender crops outdoors. Zone 8b gardeners can often put those same crops in the ground in late March in favorable years.

Zone 8a's last spring frost typically occurs around mid-April. Zone 8b gardeners often see their last frost in mid-to-late March. First fall frost arrives in late October for Zone 8a and in early November for Zone 8b, giving both subzones long and productive fall growing seasons.



# Challenges in the Zone 8 Garden

Despite its advantages, Zone 8 presents specific challenges that require adaptation:

- Summer heat is longer and more intense than in any zone to the north. Zone 8 gardeners can face 3–4 months of serious heat, and when temperatures push past 95°F, tomato blossoms drop, cool-season crops bolt almost overnight, and even heat-loving plants struggle. Mulching heavily, watering deeply, and timing your plantings to avoid the worst of the heat are essential skills in this zone.
- Pest pressure never fully stops. In Zone 8, insects like aphids, squash bugs, and cabbage worms survive mild winters and come back strong—sometimes earlier than you expect. Staying on top of pest monitoring from late winter through fall is part of gardening here.
- Winter is mild but unpredictable. Zone 8 gardeners can grow cool-season crops through much of winter, but a surprise hard freeze can wipe out unprotected plants quickly. The mild stretches tempt you to skip the row cover—don't. Keep it on hand and watch the forecast, especially in Zone 8a where hard freezes are more likely.

## A Note About Planting Times

Within these plans, we will estimate the best time to plant each item. However, weather is unpredictable.

Ultimately, your last frost date in spring and your first frost date in fall should dictate your planting dates.



# HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

## Monthly Action Plans

Simply flip to the current month, and see what needs to be done! That said, don't let these lists overwhelm you—and don't let them become your task masters. They are simply guides to help you work within Zone 8's growing seasons and weather patterns.

Each monthly module is designed to stand alone, so you can jump in at any time of year without feeling behind or lost.

## Sample Layouts

We included three garden layouts for those who ask, "Where do I even begin?"

These aren't the only ways to arrange a garden—they're simply a starting line. (Please note they are not to scale.)

Think of them as templates that give you a concrete place to begin rather than staring at a blank space wondering how all the pieces should fit together.

## Reference Charts

We also included three quick-reference charts designed to communicate information fast.

- The **Seed Starting At-a-Glance Chart** gives you a bird's eye view of your year.
- The **Staples Garden Chart** shows you which crops to prioritize if you want to grow a year's worth of vegetables for your family.
- The **Companion Planting Chart** helps you maximize your space and naturally manage pests through strategic plant partnerships.

Enjoy!



# **MONTHLY** *Action Plans*



# JANUARY

**OVERVIEW:** January is your first seed-starting month. Zone 8 gardeners start earlier than almost anyone else in the United States, and this month that means onions, leeks, celery, rosemary, and more all go under lights. Plan now so you're not scrambling when February arrives.



**WEATHER WATCH:** Average temperature 35–55°F | Frost possible, especially in Zone 8a | Ground rarely frozen | Mild stretches can be deceiving



## PRIORITY TASKS

### WEEK 1: Plan & Order

- Finalize your seed orders
- Map out crop rotation from last year's garden
- Set up seed starting area with grow lights and heat mats
- Gather seed trays, sterile seed starting mix, and labels

### WEEK 2: First Seeds Indoors

- Start onions and leeks indoors (they need 10–12 weeks)
- Start celery indoors (slow to germinate—be patient)
- Start rosemary indoors (needs 10–12 weeks)
- Clean and inventory garden tools

### WEEK 3: More Indoor Starts

- Start peppers and eggplant indoors
- Start tomatoes indoors (Zone 8a can wait until early February)
- Start perennial herbs: thyme, oregano, sage, lavender
- Label all seed trays clearly

### WEEK 4: Prep & Monitor

- Pot up any seedlings that have outgrown starter cells
- Water seedlings from the bottom to prevent damping off
- Check stored vegetables (potatoes, sweet potatoes, winter squash) for rot
- Review last year's garden notes and plan improvements



# PLANTING GUIDE

## INDOOR SEED STARTING

CROP	START DATE	NOTES
Onions	January 1-15	Need 10–12 weeks; use short-day varieties
Leeks	January 1-15	Slow grower
Celery	January 15-31	Very slow to germinate; use heat mat
Rosemary	January 15-31	Slow germination; be patient
Peppers	January 15-31	Need 80–85°F soil to germinate; use heat mat
Eggplant	January 15-31	Bottom heat is essential
Perennial Herbs	January 15-31	Thyme, sage, oregano, lavender
Tomatoes	January 25-31	Zone 8a: wait until early February



# SEED STARTING TIPS

## BOTTOM HEATING

Pepper and eggplant seeds germinate poorly in cool soil. Use a heat mat to keep soil temperature at 80-85°F until sprouts emerge, then reduce to 70°F. Without bottom heat, germination can take 3+ weeks or fail entirely.



## LIGHT REQUIREMENTS

Once seeds sprout, they need strong light immediately. Position grow lights 2-3 inches above seedlings and run them 14-16 hours daily. Weak light creates leggy, weak transplants that struggle to recover.



## AVOID OVERWATERING

More seedlings die from overwatering than underwatering. Water from the bottom when possible, and let the soil surface dry slightly between waterings. Good drainage and air circulation prevent damping-off disease.



# SOIL TESTING

If your soil hasn't been tested recently, January is a good time to send a sample off for testing. Results take a couple of weeks, and knowing your pH and nutrient levels now gives you time to amend beds before spring planting begins.



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# COMPANION PLANTING PLANS

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