



TJs Gardening Works
Thyme to Bloom!

Spring into Summer Veggies: From Seed to Salad Bowl

"It's the in-between magic — bees in the blossoms, mint in the watering can, and that fresh-cut lawn smell curling through the window while the veggie patch wakes up for summer."

— Tammy

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Spring into Summer Veggies-From Seed to Salad Bowl

Hi fellow garden lovers, I'm Tammy, self-confessed 'plantie' and horticulturist here in the Limestone Coast, SA. For the past 25 years, I've been digging, planting, and learning what thrives (and what sulks) in our unique soils and climate. Along the way, I've built up a healthy respect for our seasons, our soil, and the little quirks that make gardening here such a rewarding challenge.

Spring is our garden's launch pad into the most abundant months of the year. The soil starts to warm, the days grow longer, and it's time to roll out the green carpet for summer's headliners, tomatoes, cucumbers, capsicums, chillies, corn, zucchini, pumpkins, and strawberries.

This guide is your seasonal roadmap from seed to salad bowl, tailored for South Australian conditions. Whether you're a first-time veggie grower or a seasoned patch pro, I hope these tips help you plant, grow, and enjoy the tastiest harvest your garden's ever seen.



Seasonal Planting Calendar - South East SA

(Adjust for your microclimate – coastal areas may be slightly earlier, frosty inland spots slightly later.) And remember, this is a guide, not gospel or law. We're free creatures to do as we please. What works for one, might not be quite right for another.

Crop	Sow Indoors	Transplant Out	Direct Sow	First Harvest
Tomatoes	Aug–Sept	Oct–Nov	—	Dec–Jan
Cucumbers	Sept–Oct	Oct–Nov	Oct–Nov	Dec–Feb
Capsicums	Aug–Sept	Oct–Nov	—	Jan–Mar
Chillies	Aug–Sept	Oct–Nov	—	Jan–Apr
Corn	—	—	Oct–Nov	Jan–Feb
Zucchini	Sept–Oct	Oct–Nov	Oct–Nov	Nov–Jan
Pumpkins	Sept–Oct	Oct–Nov	Oct–Nov	Jan–Apr
Strawberries	Winter	Oct–Nov (runners)	—	Nov–Apr





Soil Preparation for Heavy Feeders

Warm-season crops are hungry! These are the big eaters of the veggie patch, needing plenty of nutrients to fuel their rapid growth and heavy cropping through the warmer months. A little extra effort now means fewer problems and bigger harvests later.

Enrich before planting with compost + aged manure

Think of compost and manure as your soil's breakfast, a hearty, slow-burning meal to keep it going. Compost adds essential organic matter, improving soil structure and moisture retention, while aged manure gives a gentle nutrient boost. Avoid fresh manure right before planting, it can be too strong and potentially burn young roots.

Add some organic pelletised slow-release fertiliser

Slow-release fertilisers provide a steady trickle of nutrients over the growing season, which is perfect for crops like tomatoes, capsicums, and pumpkins that will be in the ground for months. Look for Neutrogs Gyganic for fruits and veggies or Rapid Raiser.

Tip: Not a choice, it's a must!

Always prehydrate your seedlings and water them in with a health treatment such as Seasol or Seamungus. It's essential not to miss this step as it prevents transplant shock, stimulates their roots to get going and boosts the plants immune system.





Soil Preparation for Heavy Feeders

pH sweet spot: 6.0–6.8 for nutrient uptake

Your soil's pH is like a gatekeeper for nutrients, if it's too high or too low, plants can't access what's already there. For most warm-season crops, a slightly acidic to neutral range is ideal. Test your soil with a simple pH kit, and if adjustments are needed, add garden lime to raise pH or elemental sulphur to lower it.

No-dig option: Layer compost, manure, and mulch, let the worms do the mixing

Don't break your back digging. You can still prep a feast for your plants by simply layering compost and manure directly on top of the soil, then cover with a thick mulch. Over time, worms and soil microbes will naturally incorporate these layers, improving fertility without you lifting a spade. This method also protects soil life and structure, which means happier, healthier plants.

🐛 Fun Fact

Did you know, Earthworms are the ultimate garden recyclers, munching through scraps and turning them into “garden gold” (yes, worm poo!). Their castings can be up to a whopping 5 times richer in nitrogen and 7 times richer in phosphorus than your soil, what little troupers!!!



Microclimate Tips - Watch Those Late Frosts!

In the Limestone Coast, spring can be a bit of a trickster, warm, sunny days can lull you into planting early, only for a sneaky frost to sweep in overnight. Late frosts are more common in low-lying areas, open paddocks, and frost hollows where cold air settles. I'm not saying not to plant yet but, If you're keen to get a head start, here's a few things you should do:

- *Harden off seedlings outdoors in a sheltered spot for a week before planting out*
- *Use frost cloth, old sheets, or hessian overnight if frost is forecast*
- *Take advantage of warmer microclimates, plant close to brick walls, in raised beds, or near paths and paving that hold daytime warmth*
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A little patience (or a bit of night-time plant tucking-in) can save you from frostbitten tomatoes and sulky zucchinis. (Check out the pic of my seedlings at work, Naracoorte Mitre 10, all tucked in with their frost cloth on keeping them warm and protected♥️🌱





Be Space Savvy-Think Outside the Square

Not every gardener has endless rows of beds to fill, but that doesn't mean you can't grow a summer feast! With a bit of creativity, you can squeeze more produce into small spaces while keeping your plants healthier and happier.

Climbing & Sprawling Crops

Cucumbers, beans, and snow peas are naturals for trellises, arches, or mesh panels. Training them upward saves ground space, keeps fruit cleaner, and improves airflow (less chance of powdery mildew).

Rockmelon, pumpkins and zucchini can be coaxed over a sturdy trellis too, but make sure to support heavy fruit with old stockings or cloth slings.



Vertical Gardening

Try wall-mounted planters or stacked pots for herbs, strawberries, and even compact tomatoes. Perfect for patios, courtyards, or that blank fence needing some greenery.

Be Space Savvy-Think Outside the Square

Hanging Harvests

Baskets aren't just for flowers! Cherry tomatoes, strawberries, and trailing herbs like thyme or oregano do brilliantly in hanging baskets, safe from slugs and snails.



Interplanting

Tuck quick-growing lettuce, radish, or basil between slower giants like tomatoes or corn. By the time the bigger plants sprawl out, you've already harvested the fillers.

Pot Pow

Don't underestimate containers, from half wine barrels to quirky upcycled tubs. Great for mobility (chasing the sun or sheltering from frost) and keeping greedy root spreaders contained.

Microclimate Hacks

Use trellises, fences, or tall crops like corn to cast partial shade for lettuce or herbs that sulk in full summer sun. In frosty Limestone Coast springs, young seedlings tucked near a warm brick wall or under cloches get a head start.





Tammy's Crunchy Zucchini Pickles

Recipe Time!

If there's one thing gardeners learn the hard way, it's that you should never turn your back on a zucchini plant. One day it's a perfect little finger-length beauty, and the next, bam! it's the size of a cricket bat and ready to feed a small army.

That's why recipes like my zucchini pickles are a lifesaver. And if you still find yourself drowning in green torpedoes, share the love! Pass them on to family, friends, neighbours, or even leave a basket at your front gate. Trust me, no one's ever truly sad to get a homegrown zucchini (unless it's their third basket that week).

Wanna grow Zucchini's? Here's how 🍌



Tams Zucchini Pickles



THE TOO MANY ZUCCHINIS, PROBLEM SOLVER!

You'll Need:

- 1kg zucchini, thinly sliced
- 2 med. onions thinly sliced
- 1 cup salt
- 2 1/2 cups white vinegar
- 2 cups sugar
- 1 tsp turmeric
- 1 tbsp celery seeds (optional)
- 1 tbsp yellow mustard seeds
- 1/4 tsp ground black pepper



How to Make:

1. **Slice & Salt**- In a large bowl, layer the zucchini & onion, & sprinkle with salt. Cover and refrigerate for 2 hrs to draw out moisture.
2. **Drain & Rinse**-Rinse the zucchini and onion under cold water, then drain thoroughly.
3. **Make the Pickling Brine**-In a large saucepan, combine the vinegar, sugar, mustard seeds, turmeric, celery seeds and pepper. Bring to a gentle boil, stirring to dissolve the sugar.
4. **Add Veggies**- Stir in the zucchini and onion slices, then bring back to the boil, simmer for 5 minutes.
5. **Jar it Up**-Ladle the hot mixture into sterilised jars making sure the zucchini is fully covered with the brine. Seal immediately.
6. **Store & Enjoy**- Allow to cool, then refrigerate. Flavour develops beautifully after a few days.



Companion Planting concepts

Companion planting is like playing matchmaker in the garden, pairing plants that help each other grow, keep pests in check, or simply look great together. Some plants make natural bodyguards, others share nutrients or shade, and a few even boost their neighbour's flavour. It's an age-old gardening trick that works with nature rather than against it, creating a healthier, more balanced veggie patch (and saving you a few headaches along the way). Here are a few classic, well known combos for you to try...

Tomato + Basil

This is a garden classic for a reason, basil doesn't just look and smell amazing, it actually helps to repel pests like whitefly and aphids that love to munch on tomatoes. Even better, gardeners swear that planting basil close to tomatoes can enhance their flavour. Plus, nothing beats stepping outside and grabbing both for a fresh bruschetta or pasta sauce.

Corn + Beans + Zucchini – “The Three Sisters”

This ancient planting method, passed down from Native American traditions, is like nature's ultimate team sport. Beans climb up the corn stalks instead of needing a trellis, while the beans' roots fix nitrogen into the soil to feed all three crops. Zucchini sprawls at the base, acting as a living mulch to shade the soil and keep weeds down. Together, they create a self-sustaining mini-ecosystem that's perfect for warm-season beds.





Companion Planting concepts

Marigolds

Bright, cheerful, and endlessly hardworking, marigolds are more than just a pretty face. Their roots release natural chemicals that help repel nematodes, tiny, soil-dwelling pests that can damage your veggies. Above ground, their sunny blooms lure in pollinators while distracting harmful insects from your main crops. They're like the friendly neighbour who also happens to be great at home security.

Nasturtiums

If your veggie patch were a nightclub, nasturtiums would be the bouncers. They're brilliant at pulling aphids away from your prized crops by acting as a trap plant, the pests flock to nasturtiums instead of your tomatoes or cucumbers. As a bonus, both the leaves and flowers are edible, adding a peppery kick to salads. Win-win!

Strawberries + Borage

Borage is the strawberry's best mate. Its star-shaped blue flowers are a magnet for bees, ensuring excellent pollination and bigger harvests. Gardeners also say borage can subtly improve the flavour of strawberries (and even help repel some pests). Plus, those delicate blue blooms look stunning nestled among the strawberry plants – it's functional beauty at its best.



Pest & Problem Watchlist

Even the healthiest veggie patch gets a few uninvited guests now and then. From sneaky sap-suckers to leaf-munchers and the odd spot of mildew, these challenges are just part of the gardening journey. The good news? Most pests and problems can be kept in check with a little know-how, a watchful eye, and some gentle, garden-friendly fixes.

Aphids & Whitefly

These tiny sap-suckers can quickly multiply and leave your plants looking sad and sticky. For a quick fix, blast them off with a strong jet of water from the hose, surprisingly satisfying! For a longer-term solution, neem oil works wonders, coating the pests and disrupting their life cycle without harming beneficial insects (as long as you spray in the cool of the day).

Fruit Fly

Every gardener's summer nemesis in South Australia. Protect your precious harvest by slipping exclusion bags over individual fruits or clusters. Set traps early to monitor activity, and harvest as soon as crops are ripe, don't give the flies time to lay their eggs. Dispose of any damaged fruit quickly to break the cycle. [Check PIRSA for details of where fruit fly is being monitored.](#)





Pest & Problem Watchlist

Caterpillars

Those tell-tale chewed leaves and little black droppings? You've got caterpillar visitors. The simplest fix is to inspect your plants daily and hand-pick them off (great if you have chooks who appreciate the snack). For bigger outbreaks, use an organic spray containing Bacillus thuringiensis (BT), it targets caterpillars but is safe for bees and other beneficial bugs. (Look on the shelf for a Yates product called Dipel TM)

Powdery Mildew (Zucchini & Cucumbers)

This common fungal disease shows up as a dusty white coating on leaves, slowing growth and reducing yield. Water at soil level rather than splashing the leaves, and space plants well to improve airflow. A surprising home remedy is milk spray, mix 1 part milk to 10 parts water and spritz affected leaves in the morning sun. It changes the leaf surface pH and helps slow the mildew spread.

Snails & Slugs

Nighttime marauders that love tender seedlings and juicy leaves. Old-school beer traps work a treat, they're lured in by the smell and can't get back out. Copper tape around pot rims or raised beds gives them a mild electric-like shock, and for the hands-on gardener, a torchlight patrol after dark can keep numbers down.





Summer Herbs You'll Love

Fresh herbs are the secret ingredient to making summer meals sing, adding bursts of flavour, colour, and aroma that can turn the simplest dish into something special. Best of all, they're some of the easiest plants to grow alongside your warm-season veggies, tucking neatly into garden beds, pots, or even the gaps between bigger crops so you can pick them fresh whenever you need them.

Parsley

- Type: Biennial (often grown as an annual)
- Sun: Full sun to part shade
- Tip: Regular picking keeps plants leafy and stops early flowering.
- Use: Chopped into salads, pasta, or fresh tabbouleh

Sweet Basil

- Type: Annual
- Sun: Full sun, sheltered from strong winds
- Tip: Pinch out flower buds to keep leaves sweet and tender

Use: Pesto, caprese salad, fresh with tomatoes



Wanna give growing basil a go? Here's how ➡

Summer Herbs You'll Love

Basil is seriously amazing stuff! It isn't just a pretty herb to grow, it's packed with goodness that can help with digestion, boosting your immune system, and even take the edge off a stressful day. Toss it through a salad, steep it in a tea, or scatter it fresh over pizza and pasta. I'm not really into rich tomato sauces on pizza bases, so I use my own home-made basil pesto instead, and it's a game changer. You could also spread it on toast, swirl it into soups, or use it as a dip.

I just had to share my recipe with you... so here it is!



Tammy's No-Fail Basil Pesto



The taste of summer in a jar!

You'll Need:

- 2 cups packed fresh basil leaves
- ¼ cup grated Parmesan cheese
- ¼ cup toasted pine nuts*
- 2 garlic cloves, roughly chopped
- ½ cup extra virgin olive oil
- ½ lemon, juiced

How to Make:

1. Combine basil, Parmesan, pine nuts, and garlic in a food processor. Pulse until finely chopped.
2. Scrape down the sides, then with the motor running, drizzle in olive oil. Process until smooth, pausing to add lemon juice and season with salt and pepper.
3. Transfer to a jar and top with a thin layer of olive oil. Store in the fridge for up to a week (if it lasts that long!)



Tammy's Tip:

Substitute the toasted pine nuts with almonds, cashews, or walnuts for a different flavour twist.

Summer Herbs You'll Love



Thyme

- Type: Perennial.
- Sun: Full sun
- Tip: Loves well-drained soil; don't overwater
- Use: Roast veggies, BBQ meats, infused oils

Oregano

- Type: Perennial
- Sun: Full sun
- Tip: The hotter the sun, the stronger the flavour
- Use: Pizza topping, tomato sauces, Greek salads

Sage

- Type: Perennial
- Sun: Full sun
- Tip: Avoid soggy soil; prune lightly after flowering
- Use: Herb butter, stuffing, roast veg



Chives

- Type: Perennial
- Sun: Full sun to light shade
- Tip: Cut leaves right down to encourage fresh growth
- Use: Sprinkle on potatoes, omelettes, salads
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Mint (for the mojito!) 🍹

- Type: Perennial (can be invasive)
- Sun: Part shade to full sun.
- Tip: Best grown in pots to stop spreading
- Use: Iced tea, fruit salads, garnishes, cocktails

Nothing beats the flavour of homegrown herbs, once you start picking fresh, you'll never want to go back to store-bought. 🌿🌟

Herb Growing Tip: Tuck herbs into the gaps between veggies or grow them in pots close to the kitchen for quick picking.

Spring into Summer Planting Checklist

Prepare & Plant

- ☐ Check soil temp (12°C+ at night)
- ☐ Add compost & manure
- ☐ Test & adjust pH (6.0–6.8)
- ☐ Sow or transplant tomatoes
- ☐ Sow cucumbers, zucchini, pumpkins
- ☐ Sow corn direct
- ☐ Plant capsicums & chillies
- ☐ Plant strawberry runners

Companions & Herbs

- ☐ Plant basil near tomatoes
- ☐ Sow marigolds for pest deterrence
- ☐ Add nasturtiums as trap crop
- ☐ Plant parsley, thyme, oregano, sage, chives
- ☐ Pot up mint near the kitchen

Care & Protection

- ☐ Mulch garden beds 5–7 cm thick
- ☐ Set up exclusion bags/traps for fruit fly
- ☐ Have shade cloth ready for hot days
- ☐ Check daily for caterpillars/snails
- ☐ Pinch basil flowers to keep leaves sweet

Harvest & Enjoy

- ☐ Pick regularly to encourage more fruit
- ☐ Try new recipes with fresh produce
- ☐ Freeze, pickle, or preserve excess harvest



My Website Links

- [*How to Grow Healthy Spring Tomatoes*](#)
- [*Successfully Growing Seedlings*](#)
- [*Composting - the Beginners Guide!*](#)
- [*What's Eating My Seedlings*](#)
- [*The benefits of Using Neutrog & Why It's the Best!*](#)
- [*Spring Frosts-How to Prevent Damage*](#)
- [*How to save water in the garden*](#)
- [*Get the scoop on growing pumpkins*](#)

