



## Important info about your plants

The plants you purchased today were grown in the GCBB greenhouse, with daily care from our volunteers. To ensure the best luck with your plants at home, please follow the advice below about hardening.

## What is hardening?

Hardening, or "hardening off," is the process of allowing a plant to transition from a protected indoor or greenhouse environment to the harsh outdoor conditions of fluctuating spring temperatures, wind, and full sun exposure. A gradual introduction of these outdoor stresses will cause the plant to accumulate carbohydrates, to trigger more root development, to reduce the amount of freeze-prone water in the plant, and to actually thicken its cell walls. Plant growth will change from soft and supple to much firmer and harder.

## Hardening process

- When temperatures are at least 45-50°F, move plants outdoors to a shady, protected spot for increasingly long periods of time.
- Initially place in a shaded, sheltered location for the first few days.
- Gradually increase the amount of sunlight the plants receive over a 10-day to two-week period. The last day or two, the plants can spend 24 hours outside.
- Reduce the amount of water plants receive, but do not allow them to wilt.
- Avoid placing seedlings outdoors on windy days or if inclement weather is expected.
- Cold frames are excellent places to harden plants, but another spot that provides protection, such as a porch, will work.
- Pay attention to the weather forecast; if temperatures will fall below 45°F, be prepared to bring the plants inside.

## Example hardening schedule

Keep in mind that the overall goal of hardening is to slow the growth of the plants to allow them to adjust to a change in conditions. After proper hardening, even warmth-

loving vegetables, such as tomatoes, can withstand an unexpected dip in spring temperatures.

Here's a schedule for hardening off plants:

- **Day 1:** Start with a short amount of time, like 30 minutes, in a shady area.
- **Day 2:** Increase the time to an hour.
- **Days 3–4:** Add 30 minutes each day and gradually move to sunny area.
- **Days 5-9:** Increase the time by a full hour each day.
- **End of 10 days:** The plants should be ready to spend a full day outdoors.

### Local last frost dates

Shown below are the average dates of last Spring frost by probability.

Source: garden.org and based on new 2023 zone map.

Town	50% probability of no frost	90% probability of no frost
Dartmouth, Zone 7a	April 23	May 6
Fairhaven, Zone 7a	April 23	May 6
Fall River, Zone 7a	May 18	June 5
Mattapoissett, Zone 7a	April 23	May 6
Marion, Zone 7a	May 7	May 20
New Bedford, Zone 7a	April 23	May 6
Wareham, Zone 7a	May 7	May 20
Westport, Zone 7a	April 23	May 6

### Tomatoes

Tomatoes are a warm season vegetable and won't tolerate cool temperatures or frost. Don't transplant the seedlings into garden beds or containers until the risk of frost has passed and day temperatures are above 60 F (15 C) and night temperatures are above 50 F (10 C). Don't try and rush tomato seedlings into the garden! Heat-loving crops like tomatoes and peppers are more susceptible to cold damage so proper hardening off and proper timing is essential.

*And: Thank you for supporting The Garden Club of Buzzards Bay Plant Sale!*