

Decode your seed packet

Planting depth

How far below the surface the seed should sit. Tiny seeds are often sown shallowly; always read the variety-specific directions.

Seed spacing

Distance between seeds at sowing, which can differ from the final spacing for mature plants.

Thinning / plant spacing

How far apart to leave plants after germination. This matters in raised beds and intensive planting too.

Row spacing

Space intended for access or field-style planting. It is not always the best guide for a small raised bed.

Days to maturity

An estimate under suitable conditions. Note whether the count starts at seeding or transplanting.

Sunlight

Full sun often means at least six hours of direct sunlight. Crops differ in their tolerance for shade.

Season

Cool-season crops and warm-season crops need different soil temperatures and planting windows.

Spacing without guesswork

Think in mature plant space

Instead of copying long field rows, plan each plant around its mature width, airflow, roots and access. Some seed packet row spacing assumes farm equipment or paths. Do not assume crowded plants are healthier.

Starter spacing examples

Leaf lettuce: often 6–12 inches. Bush beans: often 4–6 inches. Radishes: often 2–3 inches. Basil: often 8–12 inches. These are broad examples, not universal rules. Follow the seed packet and your local extension recommendations.

Remember your site

Even the best spacing cannot overcome too little sun, poor drainage, excessive heat, or an unsuitable growing season. Choose crops for the actual conditions in your garden.

PRACTICAL CHECKLIST

- ☐ Check sun exposure before choosing a crop
- ☐ Check last-frost estimates and your local extension calendar
- ☐ Read both sowing spacing and final plant spacing
- ☐ Leave access for watering, harvesting and airflow
- ☐ Plan to thin or transplant excess seedlings

Sketch your starter garden

Your growing space

Circle one: containers / raised bed / in-ground. Then write the usable length, width, and approximate direct-sun hours.

Use this grid to sketch beds, containers, pathways and your first few plants.

My location / ZIP: _____

Sun hours: _____ Bed or container size: _____

Three plants I enjoy eating or using: _____

My next action: _____

Educational planning guide. Verify cultivar, climate, sunlight and seasonal recommendations locally.