

- Speaker 1: [00:00](#) Welcome to the old fashioned on purpose podcast. Today I am answering a question from a listener, which is actually a question I've had from a lot of you and that is how do you start a garden from scratch? If you've never garden before you have a Brown thumb, where do you begin? So I'm going to dive into that question plus a whole lot more. In today's episode, I'm your host Jill Winger and for the last 10 years I have been helping people just like you who feel disenchanting by modern life. I'll show you how to leave the rat race and create the life you really want by learning how to grow your own food and master old fashioned skills no matter where you may live. Okay, so at the time of this recording, I don't know when you're going to be listening to it, but right now it is cold and windy and gardening is not anything I am currently actively doing.
- Speaker 1: [01:02](#) However, this is the perfect time to start the planning process. In fact, this is the time to start planning. So I love this question when I get it from listeners or people on social media or blog readers because it means that you guys are scheming how you can produce more, how you can grow more of your own food. Even if you live in town, or you have a little backyard or maybe you just have an apartment balcony. I love that. So many of you are wanting to go there and become a grower. So, this is going to be a back to basics episode. Some of you won't need this info if you're an experienced gardener or you've been doing this for a long time, but if you have never grown something and the gardening has been on your goal list year after year and it just hasn't ever come to fruition, this is an episode I think you will find super helpful.
- Speaker 1: [01:59](#) Okay, so I'm just going to go kind of on a need to know basis because that is how my brain works. I do not like having a ton of info all at once. And my learning style is, I just kind of will grab the pieces I need to get me started and then I learn as I go. So I'm going to assume that that's kind of maybe how you are too. And I'm just going to give you the info that you need, the bare bones basics so you can actually get started because that's the key to any of these homestead projects is starting. That's the hardest part is the part where you're going to have that most of that resistance and it's going to feel the most uncomfortable. And then once you do that, things get so much easier. And I would prefer you to just go out there and start planting something and then figure out what to do the rest of the way.
- Speaker 1: [02:51](#) Kind of like jumping out of the airplane and building a parachute on the way down rather than, you know, researching gardening for years. And then maybe at the end you'll plant a tomato plant. Like that's not how we roll around here. We just want you

to take action, get going and start to see some results. So that's the method that we're going to talk about today, but the good news is gardening is not complicated even if it feels formidable, even if you have never ever done it before. I think it's one of the simplest aspects of living in old fashioned life that you can adopt without a lot of overhead, without a lot of investment and is so simple and so rewarding because you get to eat what you produce. So all right, first things first you've never gotten before. What I want you to do is to jump on your phone or your computer or whatever and figure out via Google, good old Google what your first and last frost dates are.

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Or maybe I should say that the other way. What your last and first cause you need to know your last frost date first. Holy moly, that's confusing. I just said that. Let me explain that a different way. Your last frost date is the day of the year in spring, usually or summer if you're in Wyoming where you have no more risk of a frost because frost is a Gardener's worst enemy. It's like you need to know where, you know, depending on where you live, because it's different for all of us that day of the year in spring where you can safely begin to plant things. And I feel like that's the most important thing you need to know. And if you Google frost state calculators and so on, you'll find tons of free tools online that will help you figure that out in just a few seconds. The other thing you need to know in conjunction with that is your zone.

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So I'm going to assume that most of you listening are in the United States. I know I have some Canadian and maybe some other international listeners, but just for the sake of the example, we're gonna stick with the U S right now. Um, you can look up United States or USDA gardening zones and you'll see tons of maps come up on Google that tell you what zone you're in. You just find your state on the map and it'll say zone five or zone seven. And then you'll know that you can then use like zone five and you go look up the first and the last frost dates of zone five. And that's, you know, put it on a little index cards, stick it in your planner, stick it on your fridge, whatever. But that's the most important piece. So you know what you can grow. Cause I feel like one of the things that really trips up new gardeners is that they, um, plant something and they don't realize, Oh Hey, I can't grow okra in Wyoming.

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Or I can't plant things in March even though we had a 60 degree day. And then they get frozen out or things die prematurely and it gets really frustrating. So those frost dates calculators will save you from a whole lot of frustration. So for us in Wyoming, our last frost date is about May 31st believe it or not, so many

of you listening are going to have a much better last frost date. You may even be able to plant your frost sensitive seeds or seedlings into the ground outside in April or May, I don't know, maybe even March if you're in a really a Southern state. But we have to wait all the way until the end of May before I can put out the things that are sensitive to frost, which would be things like beans or corn or squash. Any of those guys. There are some plants, uh, greens like kale and spinach or maybe some peas, lettuce, things like that, that can be planted or have be germinating in your garden.

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And if they get a little bit of a frost on them, it won't just annihilate them. So you can plant those a little bit earlier. For the sake of your first year, you're probably going to be sticking with the vegetables that are a little bit more basic. And most of the basic ones are your plant. You know, you just plant them after that last frost day. So super simple. You just need to know that day and then put it on your calendar and circle it in a big red pins. You know exactly when it is. Okay. So once you have that figured out, now we're going to work backwards. So I want you to, and maybe you probably already have this part partially figured out where you're going to plant. So it may be in buckets on your porch. If you live in an apartment, it may be in a raised bed garden, it may be an actual just patch of dirt in your backyard.

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But you just need to know where you're going to start planting primarily because if you are doing the plants in the ground method, which is super easy and super cheap, um, you need to have that site prep. Now, maybe you have a home or you're renting a place that had an existing garden, so that will make your job a little bit easier. You just have to till it up. Or maybe you're literally starting with bare Virgin ground that's never seen a vegetable before. It maybe is got lawn or just a patch of dirt and you're going to have to do the prep yourself. So you need to know where your plants are going to be living over the growing season so you can get it ready. I would suggest that you plan if you're starting with, a patch of ground that has never been gardened before, that you give yourself a good month to get it prepped before you're going to want pudding, wants to put those seeds in the ground.

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I've been at that point where, I, we had waited to the last minute and I'm like, Oh my gosh, I got all these seeds and seedlings that need to go outside and we haven't even tilled yet. And it's stressful and it just makes it not as much fun. So I would suggest giving yourself a good 30 days if your weather will allow to get the garden prepped and, and raked out or

whatever it needs, before those plants are ready to go in. So for us, in our zone, and again, your zone will probably be different. I would say if I was rototilling my garden or trying to prep a garden plot, I would be gunning for about the end of April 1st part of may. For me to be out there prepping that plot. So I give myself lots of time, uh, as far as a rototiller.

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So if you don't have one, which I'm assuming you probably don't if you've never gardened before. What we did in our early years is we borrowed one. Oftentimes your gardening neighbors will have one and you can do a barter or an exchange for a another favor or maybe some home baked goodies. You can also rent them. We've done that before, like your rental services that might, rent small equipment or machinery. Sometimes they will have rototillers that you can grab for a weekend. Or we just ended up buying one. After awhile we saved up our pennies back in our early homesteading days and just invested in our own rototiller. Sometimes you find the news, we bought a newer one. It was kind of a mid-grade model because we knew we'd be using it for a long time, but that's been a good investment. It definitely has paid off.

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And even though we now have raised bed gardens, we still use a rototiller for other projects when we're landscaping or digging things up. So it's not a bad thing to have as a gardener or a homestead type of person. Okay. So next step. Now this is kind of an optional step. If you are the type of person who feels better when you have a lot of prep and planning into your projects, then you can do a soil test in early spring. And I talk about this on the blog, I'll drop a link to my soil test blog post with all the info. And so you can understand how it works. It's really inexpensive, but you take a little soil sample, you mail it in somewhere and they tell you what kind of nutrients or soil has, maybe what it has a lot of, or maybe what is lacking.

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And if you're really that type of person who wants to be ultra prepared, you can do that step and then add amendments if necessary. Now, honestly, I did not do this for years and years and years at the beginning and we were fine. We did add a little bit of composted horse manure to our very first plot as we tilt it up and called it good. I didn't test it. I didn't worry about it. It was okay. So I would say odds are you're probably not going to necessarily need to do a soil test. Your first go round wouldn't hurt. It's nice to have that peace of mind. Um, but don't let that stop you from just moving forward. Like, I don't want you to go, Oh, I didn't get my soil test on this year, so I'm not gonna plant like, no, no, no, no.

- Speaker 1: [11:45](#) That's not how we roll. I want you to just go for it. If that's, you know, don't let that be the obstacle standing between you and your vegetables. Okay. So all the prep is done as far as plot, at least mentally done. Maybe you can't be out there digging entailing yet. Cause if you're like me, there's snow on the ground like a lot of snow, but you have the stuff prepped, you have it marked on the calendar when you're going to prep the plot, when you're going to put the seeds in, then it's time to get the seeds or be thinking about what you're going to plant. Now I love heirloom seeds and I have a whole nother podcast episode all about heirlooms and where I get them and why I love them. It's a good idea to actually order your heirloom seeds as early as possible.
- Speaker 1: [12:29](#) So I guess I, I kind of need to eat my words a little bit there. You don't want to wait till everything else is done to order the seeds. You may kind of want to do that in tandem because some of those heirloom varieties will begin to sell out if you wait til April or may to order now. I mean, don't worry too much because there's still seeds available. It just might not be your first pick. And there's always the options in your local home. And garden stores. And those usually don't even get put on the shelf until later in the spring, at least for us. But for best pick, best selection, I would go earlier versus later. And for your first year, it depends on your level of adventurousness. I would suggest going with the staples. Think about what your family likes to eat, what they enjoy most, what you like to cook, and maybe just keep it simple for that first year.
- Speaker 1: [13:19](#) Don't go super exotic, don't go with anything super complicated. Pay attention to the both the vegetables you select and the varieties you select to make sure they can fit into your growing zone window. So like I mentioned, our last frost date of spring is May 31st aka, that's like summer, right? And then our first frost date, in the fall is usually around mid September. So I have a very, very small window. So when I'm shopping for seeds, I'm making sure that they tell me how long it takes for that variety to mature. So I know it can fit into that window. And that sets me up for success. But some basics that are kinda crowd pleasers for everybody. You know, beans and some peas, some especially some like sugar snap peas. Corn is always a good one. Potatoes are really satisfying to grow.
- Speaker 1: [14:16](#) Onions are easy, you get them in sets, they're just a little teeny baby onions. You can just plant them right in the ground, super easy. And then the root vegetables, like the carrots and the beets, those are really, really simple, that don't take a lot of extra consideration. And then of course like the greens, if you

love kale or spinach or lettuces, those are very simple. They can handle a little bit of frost. They can, they like a little bit of cooler weather. So plant them in the shady spots of your garden. But those are just tried and true. They're not complicated and they're going to help you get your confidence built up in that very first year.

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And then once it comes time to actually garden, it's really just a matter of riding that day on the calendar when you plan to plant and just doing it. So, you know, get that, that soil tilled up and if you have some composted manure or you have some sort of fertilizer, you could maybe throw that in. I wouldn't say that's an absolute necessity. And then, you know, rake, everything's smooth and just go for it. Just look at the back of your seed packet. It'll tell you how deep to plant each seed. I'll be honest, I never have a ruler out with me in the garden. I just do my best guess as far as spacing and depth and that usually works out just fine. You'll be surprised at how forgiving gardening is. It's pretty darn forgiving, which is a really good thing for people like me.

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And then do the weeding and the watering. So that is what it takes to start your first gardening. You don't have to overthink companion planting at this point. I don't want you to overthink making it this, this beautiful, you know, English garden the first year. I just want to see you getting out there, getting your fingers in the soil and making it happen. Cause that's the hardest step. And once you get that out of the way, it's going to get easier and easier. And yes, of course there is more information on how to harvest the vegetables and what to do with the vegetables, but we'll focus on that in a later episode. This is just about getting you started getting you out of the gate. So I'm so excited for you this year. Let 2020 be your gardening year your first time for, for many of you and I cannot wait to see what you grow.

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So if you're ready to do this homesteading thing and you know, do the gardens, even if you live in the city or an apartment or you know, just add more old fashioned skills to your life that you're not quite sure where or how to start. Well I've got you covered and I happen to have a quick start garden planting guide that will help you immensely as you plant your first garden and you can grab this guide as a part of my homestead resource library. It's free over at theprairiehomestead.com/grow one more time. That's theprairiehomestead.com/grow and that is it for this episode. My friends, thank you for listening. If you enjoyed what you heard, it would mean a lot to me. If you'd pop over, hit

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