


## Selecting plants

Once you've decided what crops you'd like to grow this year, you need to consider which varieties suit you best. All vegetables come in a wide range of colours, sizes, flavours, and types suited to different growing conditions. Two important considerations are space (how big the plant is going to get, both above and below ground) and climate (especially how long your growing season will be). One plant that illustrates this well is tomatoes (*see box*), as the concerns of variety and growing season are relevant for all crops.

Selecting Tomato Varieties	
<p><b>Space:</b> Tomatoes come in two varieties: <i>determinate</i> which grow to about 3 feet and produce only once a season, and <i>indeterminate</i>, which have vines that continue to grow and produce throughout the season.</p>	
<p><b>Climate:</b> Choosing a type of tomato that suits Toronto's climate as well as the specific climate of your garden is important. Different types mature more quickly, so are better suited to short growing seasons or if you start on your garden late in the season. Some excellent quick maturing varieties are: Alisa Craig (70 days), Early Girl (60 days), or Bush Beefsteak (62 days).</p>	

Another important consideration is whether to grow from seed or start with **seedlings**. Growing from seed is an excellent way to learn about and be in control of the growth of your plants from start to finish. In addition, it's much more cost effective: 30 cucumber seeds or 100 beet seeds sell for about \$3.00, and if you save seeds you can supply your own year after year.

Seed packets provide specific dates and details about planting, including depth for seeds and necessary sun exposure. Some seeds, like lettuce and beans, can be planted directly into the garden once the soil warms up. Other more delicate plants, like tomatoes, eggplant and peppers, need to be started indoors, about 6-8 weeks before the last frost date (the last day the ground is expected to freeze). This year, the **last frost date in Toronto is May 9**, it changes each year but can be easily looked up online.

Starting seedlings requires heat and water that are both consistent and abundant. If you don't have a sunny window that stays around 20°C overnight, it's best to move your seedlings on top of the fridge once the sun goes down – the amount of heat it emits is just right for promoting germination. In fact, until the seedlings form

leaves, heat is more important than light, and seedlings can be left on the fridge or in another warm place constantly.

Make sure to keep note of what seeds you plant in which pots or rows of the seeding tray – new sprouts all look very similar until they grow their second set of leaves, called **true leaves**, and you'll want to know what's sprouting where. Once they are about 10cm tall and the temperature is right, your seedlings need to be hardened off before being planted outside. **Hardening off** is a process to get your plants used to being outside, and to prevent them from going into shock over the weather change. It's simple: take them out for a few hours on the first day, then gradually leave them out longer and longer, until at the end of the week they should be ready to be planted out.