

# Seasonal Planting Checklist for Southwest Michigan

Based on NOAA 1991-2020 climate normals for Benton Harbor AP, MI and USDA hardiness zone guidance.

## Quick Climate Snapshot

Median last 32F date: May 04. Median first 32F date: Oct 17. Typical 32F growing season length: 164.0 days.

Most of Southwest Michigan falls in USDA Hardiness Zones 6a to 6b, which supports a wide range of cool and warm season crops.

## 32F Frost Risk Dates (Probability)

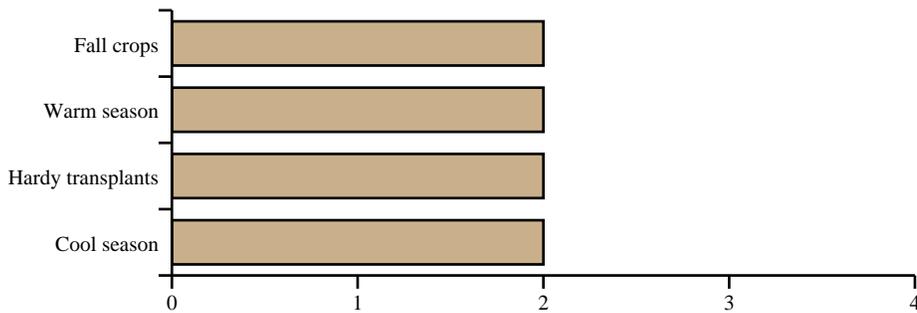
Probability	Last Spring 32F	First Fall 32F
10%	05/22	09/30
50% (median)	05/04	10/17
90%	04/19	11/01

*Interpretation: a 10% probability date is a late outlier, while a 90% probability date is an early outlier. Use the median date for planning and the 10% date when you want extra frost safety.*

## Planting Windows Anchored to the Median Last Frost

Crop Group	Timing	Example Date Range
Cool season direct sow	6 to 4 weeks before last frost	Mar 23 to Apr 06
Hardy transplants	4 to 2 weeks before last frost	Apr 06 to Apr 20
Warm season transplants	1 to 2 weeks after last frost	May 11 to May 18
Succession sowing	Every 2 to 3 weeks	May through July
Fall crops (sow)	10 to 12 weeks before first frost	Jul 25 to Aug 08

## Planting Window Lengths (weeks)



Each bar represents the suggested 2-week window for starting a crop group. Adjust a week earlier or later based on lake effect and your yard conditions.

## Monthly Checklist

Month	Focus
March	Start onions, leeks, and brassicas indoors. Prep beds if soil is workable.
April	Direct sow peas, spinach, radish. Harden off cold-tolerant starts.
May	Transplant tomatoes and peppers after the median frost. Mulch and stake.
June	Succession sow beans and lettuce. Watch for pests early.
July	Keep watering consistent. Start fall brassicas indoors.
August	Direct sow fall greens. Refresh mulch and compost.
September	Harvest and seed cover crops. Protect tender plants at night.
October	Clean beds and store tools. Record notes for next year.

## Indoor Seed Start Timing (Weeks Before Last Frost)

Crop	Weeks Before Last Frost	Notes
Onion, leek	10 to 12	Start early for strong stems
Broccoli, cabbage	6 to 8	Transplant while cool
Tomato	6 to 8	Pot up once before transplant
Pepper	8 to 10	Needs warmer start temps
Cucumber, squash	3 to 4	Do not overgrow indoors

## Cold Protection Checklist

- Keep row cover or old sheets ready for late spring cold snaps.
- Water soil the day before a frost to help retain heat.
- Use cloches or buckets for single plants when frost is forecast.

- Open covers in the morning to avoid overheating.

## **Disclaimer**

This guide is informational only. Weather varies by year and microclimate. Use local forecasts and protect crops when frost is possible.

## **Sources**

NOAA NCEI Climate Normals 1991-2020, station USW00094871 (Benton Harbor AP, MI).

USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map (most of Southwest Michigan is Zone 6a to 6b).

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