

Nella Mae's philosophy on early planting: Plants will come up when the conditions are right. If I put seeds in the ground early (starting the first week of February), whenever the conditions are right, things will grow. If you plant later, that's fine too--things catch up when the weather gets warmer.

When can you start?

- Watch the weather! Wait for a dry window when the soil is workable.
- You can start as soon as you have 10 hours of daylight--Feb 7 in Union County.

Early Crops (direct seed outside):

- Greens: Arugula, lettuce, spinach, kale, mustard, tatsoi, Asian greens, peas
- Root vegetables: Beets, carrots, radishes, turnips
- Herbs: Cilantro, dill, fennel
- Early transplanting: Broccoli, cabbage, kale, cauliflower, chard, tatsoi
- Overwintering crops (seeded in August): Carrots, greens, sprouting broccoli
- Fall seeded crops: Peas, cilantro (they come up in the spring)

Frost protection & season extension:

- The limiting factor for germination and plant growth are soil temperature and day length.
- Once day length is 10-11 hours (Feb 7- March 1), the limiting factor is soil temp & killing frost.
- Row cover (remay/cloche) can encourage germination, growth and protect from frost.
- Agribon 30 row cover protects down to 26 degrees and has light transmission of 70%. This is what we use on Nella Mae's Farm for frost protection as well as pest control because it is most durable.

Low hoop construction:

- Seed bed and install irrigation tape first!
- Place #9 fence wire hoops or ½ inch EMT conduit hoops 8-10' apart down your bed.
- Push hoops into ground 3-4 inches to be sturdy
  - Use rock bar to make hole for hoops to push into if need be. Or, use ¾ inch, 6-8 inch long PVC "feet" for hoops. Pound PVC into the ground first and push EMT hoops into the "feet"
- Drape hoops with remay so at least 6 inches of overlap on the ground on each side.
- Fasten ends of remay in a "pony tail" with landscape pins and weight down ends heavily. Securing the ends is important to keep fabric on hoops.
- On one side of hoop, cover remay overlap with soil as a weight.
- On the other side, use something smooth and removable like water jugs, feed sacks of gravel, sand bags, etc. to weight down. This will allow you to open one side of the hoop to weed or harvest.

Other considerations:

- If using low hoops to overwinter crops, it is best to cover remay with 6 mil plastic to prevent rips.
- Agribon 30 is thick, but it does rip. Don't use abrasive weights or even clips designed for remay. They don't work because they have sharp edges.
- You can also use "wind wires" to keep remay/plastic hoop coverings on during the winter. These are crisscrossed ropes over the hoops and secured to ground to prevent flapping.
- Overwintered plants and very young plants are the most cold hardy. New growth is most tender.
- Pick seed varieties bred as "cold hardy" or for bred for "overwintering." Look for anything with "Russian" or "evergreen" in the name