

## Hardening Off Seedlings Before Planting

Good gardening practices suggest that you should acclimate your vegetable seedlings before planting them outside. This process can take several days to a week.

If your plants are not used to being outside, it is possible that they will suffer from transplant shock if not hardened off first. The process is concerned with two things, sun, and temperature.

First, seedlings should not be outside until the temperature outside reaches at least 50 degrees all the time. Place your seedlings outside, protected from the wind, in the morning and leave the plants out for 2 - 3 hours in a partly sunny location, and then bring them back inside. Do this for a couple of days, and then you can extend the time to 3 - 4 hours for another couple of days. Always try to keep plants protected from the wind. For the next 2 - 3 days you can leave them outside in the morning in the full sun for 5 - 6 hours. Your plants should now be hardened off and ready to plant outside.

## General Steps for Planting Seedlings

After your seedlings have been hardened-off, remove the seedling from the container and gently loosen the roots. Place the seedling in a prepared hole in your garden. The seedling should sit at soil level or a little deeper. Do not bury the lowest leaves. Firm the soil around the seedling with your hands. It is best to plant your seedlings in the late afternoon to avoid exposure to the intense heat of the day.

Watering deeply encourages the roots to grow into the soil (about 1" of water per week), and the soil should not be allowed to dry out. You may fertilize at first planting and then on a regular basis until the plant is established.

