



FROM THE FILES OF THE DIRT DIVA DIARIES

Your 90-Day First Garden Plan

A beginner's week-by-week guide to your first container food garden — from zero to harvest

Ivy says: "I'm going to tell you something nobody tells beginners: the first 90 days is when most people give up — not because they failed, but because they didn't know what to expect when. This plan removes the guesswork. Follow it week by week and I promise you'll be eating something you grew yourself before Day 90."

📁 MY GARDEN SETUP — FILL IN BEFORE YOU START

My Growing Zone:

Last Frost Date:

My Growing Space:

Plan Start Date:

📁 Phase 1: Setup & Plant

Days 1-14 · Weeks 1-2

Goal: Get your containers set up, soil in, and your first plants or seeds in the ground. Don't overthink it — done is better than perfect.

📅 WEEK 1 — DAYS 1-7

- Gather your containers (check drainage holes!)
- Buy quality potting mix — NOT garden soil
- Choose your starter crops (see recommendations →)
- Label containers before planting
- Fill containers to 1" below rim
- Water in well — let drain before planting

📅 WEEK 2 — DAYS 8-14

- Plant transplants (tomatoes, peppers) at proper depth
- Direct sow seeds (lettuce, radishes, beans)
- Set up stakes or cages for tomatoes NOW
- Establish daily watering check routine
- Practice the Finger Test every morning
- Note germination dates for seeded crops

🌱 BEST STARTER CROPS

- Lettuce mix** — ready in 30-45 days
- Radishes** — ready in 25 days!
- Basil** — thrives in containers
- Cherry tomatoes** — most productive
- Bush beans** — easy, fast, rewarding
- Chives** — harvest in 30 days

🌱 Phase 2: Establish & First Harvests

Days 15-45 · Weeks 3-6

Goal: Your plants are growing. Now you're building habits, watching for problems, and picking your first food. Yes, already!

📅 WEEKS 3-4 — DAYS 15-28

- Start first liquid feeding (2-3 weeks after transplanting)
- Thin seedlings if overcrowded (hardest but necessary!)
- Inspect undersides of leaves for pests — weekly
- Begin training tomatoes up their support
- First harvest: radishes!** (Day 25-30)
- Plant second succession of radishes and lettuce

📅 WEEKS 5-6 — DAYS 29-45

- First lettuce harvest!** Cut outer leaves
- Check soil — increase watering as plants grow
- Remove yellowing lower leaves from tomatoes
- Watch for first tomato flowers — exciting!
- Feed tomatoes/peppers every 1-2 weeks
- Note what's working and what isn't

⚠️ COMMON PHASE 2 PROBLEMS

- Wilting in heat** — normal in afternoon. Check soil moisture before watering more.
- Yellowing lower leaves** on tomatoes — normal. Remove them.
- Lettuce bolting** — move to shadier spot or let go and reseed.
- Slow growth** — check light (6 hrs minimum) and start feeding.

🌱 Day 7: First seeds in	🌱 Day 14: Seedlings emerging	🌱 Day 25: First radish!	🌱 Day 35: First lettuce	🌱 Day 40: Tomato flowers	🌱 Day 45: Herbs ready
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FROM THE FILES OF THE DIRT DIVA DIARIES Your 90-Day Plan — Continued

Days 46–90: Peak season, full harvests, and planning what's next

* Phase 3: Peak Season & Full Harvests

Days 46–75 · Weeks 7–10

Goal: This is what you've been waiting for. Full harvests, consistent production, and the thrill of eating what you grew. Maintenance is now the main job.

WEEKS 7-8 — DAYS 46-60

- First tomatoes forming!** Stop pruning flowers.
- Switch tomatoes to low-N, high-P fertilizer
- Harvest beans regularly — pick to keep producing
- Harvest herbs frequently to prevent bolting
- Water 1–2x daily in heat; check containers morning and evening
- Plant fall lettuce and greens succession

WEEKS 9-10 — DAYS 61-75

- First ripe tomatoes!** (Days 60–75 for cherry, Day 70–90 for slicers)
- Harvest peppers — pick frequently for more production
- Continue weekly pest inspection — heat increases pest pressure
- Deadhead flowers on herbs to extend leaf production
- Note which varieties performed best (for next year)
- Keep succession planting cool-season crops for fall

+ HARVEST TIPS

- Tomatoes:** Pick when fully colored and slightly soft
- Peppers:** Green = mild, red/yellow = sweeter & riper
- Beans:** Pick before seeds bulge the pod
- Herbs:** Harvest in morning; always leave 1/3 of plant
- Lettuce:** Cut outer leaves; center keeps growing

Phase 4: Wind Down & Plan Ahead

Days 76–90 · Weeks 11–13

Goal: Maximize your final harvests, evaluate what worked, and set yourself up for an even better second season. You've learned more in 90 days than most gardeners learn in years.

WEEKS 11-12 — DAYS 76-86

- Reduce watering frequency as temps cool
- Stop fertilizing warm-season crops
- Harvest everything before first frost
- Save seeds from favorite varieties (tomatoes, peppers)
- Move frost-sensitive containers indoors or under cover
- Plant fall greens: kale, spinach, arugula thrive in cool weather

WEEK 13 — DAYS 87-90

- Empty and clean containers; store or cover for winter
- Refresh or replace 30% of potting mix for next season
- Record what worked, what didn't, what to try next year
- Order seeds for next season while memory is fresh!
- Celebrate — you just grew your own food!**

SEASON REFLECTION

- My biggest win this season: _____
- Biggest challenge I overcame: _____
- Crop I'll definitely grow again: _____
- Crop I'll skip next time: _____
- New crop I want to try: _____

Day 60: Tomatoes forming

Day 65: First peppers

Day 70: First ripe tomato

Day 80: Full harvest mode

Day 85: Fall greens in

Day 90: YOU DID IT!

REALISTIC HARVEST EXPECTATIONS

CROP	DAYS TO HARVEST	EXPECTED YIELD
Radishes	25–30 days	12–15 per 5-gal container
Lettuce (cut-come-again)	30–45 days	½–1 lb/week ongoing
Herbs (basil, chives)	30–45 days	Continuous with proper harvest
Bush beans	50–60 days	½–1 lb per plant
Cherry tomatoes	60–70 days	10–20 lbs per season
Peppers	65–85 days	20–30 peppers per plant
Slicing tomatoes	70–90 days	15–25 lbs per season

+ Ivy's 90-Day Survival Guide

- + The Finger Test is your best friend — use it every single day for the first month
- + When something looks wrong, isolate first, diagnose second, treat third
- + Containers forgive missed days better than neglected weeks — get back on track without guilt
- + Your first season is a learning season — "failure" just means you're paying attention
- + The succession planting habit (replanting every 2–3 weeks) is what separates okay gardens from great gardens
- + Write everything down — your notes from this season are worth more than any gardening book for next year