What is "Hardening Off" and how do I do it?

Hardening off means gradually acclimating plants to outdoor conditions prior to planting. Plants grown indoors or kept in a greenhouse are not accustomed to the wind, direct sun, and other conditions they will encounter outside. They could freeze, dry out, or burn if planted too soon without time to acclimate.

To harden off your plants, begin 5-7 days before transplant date. Place the plants in a sheltered, shady spot outdoors. Leave them for about 2-3 hours the first day, then gradually increase the time spent outside by 2-3 hours each day. By the third day, try to add several hours of morning sun to the outdoor time.

Bring the plants back indoors each night, or if the outdoor temperature is below 45 degrees.

After the 5-7 day period, it’s time to plant in the garden! Be aware of weather conditions, though, and be prepared to cover the young plants if inclement weather (snow, high winds, or freezing temperatures) is expected.