



## Spring on the Calendar vs. Fields in the Real World

The calendar says it is the first week of spring, but for most of the upper Midwest, the real planting window is still three to four weeks out. Insurance planting dates do a pretty good job of bracketing when it actually makes sense to get serious about dropping corn and soybeans in the ground, and that is usually the true starting line for the season—not March 20 on the calendar.

That gap, between official spring and real planting, is where a lot of good (or bad) decisions get made. There is plenty of coffee-shop talk, a few shiny planters sitting in the shed, and usually a couple of warm days that make you think, “Maybe we could just start...” The key is to remember that the crop will not pay you for being early in March if the field is not truly fit until April.

For the next few weeks, the best work is pretty simple:

Watch soil moisture and soil temperature, not just air temps. Fit fields have seedbeds that crumble at planting depth rather than smear, and soils that are near or above about 50°F with a warming trend.

Keep an eye on the extended forecast as you creep toward those insurance planting dates. A good seedbed planted just ahead of a cold, wet stretch can still turn into a headache.

Sort out which fields are your best first pass candidates and which ones you know from experience warm slowly or stay wet. Higher, better-drained ground generally fits the early window better than the low, heavy stuff.

Use this early spring window to line things up so that when weather and the soil both say, “go,” you are actually ready—without talking yourself into forcing a field that is not there yet.



## Early Soybeans, Fit Fields, and Not Getting Ahead of Yourself

There has been a big shift over the last few years toward planting soybeans earlier, and the data backs that up: within reason, earlier beans tend to carry more yield potential than late beans. More season to stack nodes, more sunlight on a full canopy, and more flexibility in the overall planting window—it all adds up.

### The logic is pretty simple:

More season. Early planting gives beans more time to stack nodes, and nodes are where pods form; more nodes generally mean more pod sites and a higher yield ceiling.

More sunlight. An early, full canopy catches more light during the longest days of the year and uses soil moisture more efficiently, which is a big part of why early-planted soybeans often win in yield trials.

More flexibility. Getting some beans in early takes pressure off the rest of the planting window; if weather shuts you down later, you already have acres in the ground banking yield.

But, earlier does not mean whenever the frost leaves. It means moving soybeans toward the front of an already good window, not breaking the glass and trying to farm in March.

### A simple way to turn all of this into a 2026 plan:

Use insurance planting dates as your anchor. Treat those as the real open of the planting window for both crops; they are set with risk and historic weather in mind, and planting much earlier can change the conversation around replant coverage.

Make soybeans part of the first wave—if fields are ready. When soils are around 50°F at planting depth, trending warmer, and the field passes the shovel test (crumbles, not smears), that is when early beans earn their keep.

Let field conditions overrule the calendar. If a favorite early field is still sticky and cold, do not talk yourself into it because the date looks good; move to a better-drained field or wait a couple of days. The best early-bean stories always start with the field was perfect, not the date that looked cool on Twitter.

Aim for the front half of the window, not the edge. The real goal is to get the bulk of soybeans planted in that first, high-yield part of the window once insurance dates and soils line up. Consistently being on the front side usually beats being crazy early one year and late the next.

So, as this first week of spring rolls by, the message is pretty clear: we are close, but we are not there yet. Use the next three to four weeks to get the plan sharp, the planter right, and the field list sorted. When the weather and seedbed say those first fields are truly ready, that is the time to let early beans and well-timed corn do their thing—not a random warm afternoon in March.

### Sources

University of Minnesota Extension – soybean planting basics and timing

Iowa State University – early soybean planting considerations and planting-date guidance

Michigan State University Extension – planting soybeans early: benefits, risks, and recommendations