

When Should I Start to Seed Canola?

Despite the cold weather that is prevailing at the time I am writing this, (the last week of April), seeding is well under way in east central Alberta. Dry conditions have allowed us to get on the land earlier than normal this year and many growers have taken advantage by getting a quick start on seeding - mostly wheat and peas so far, along with a little barley. With many crops, this makes excellent sense. Studies done by Brian Beres from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada in Lethbridge have shown that there are advantages to seeding wheat early. Wheat seeded into soils that were as low as 2 C showed no adverse effects on final yield and those seeded at 4 to 6 C actually tend to show higher yields than those seeded into 10 C soils; which would have been considered ideal seeding temperatures not too many years ago. Wheat and peas can tolerate early season frosts because the young seedlings will initially have their growing points below ground level where they are protected from sudden temperature changes. Barley also falls into this category, although the above ground portions of the plant are more sensitive to frost and can be harder hit.



A much riskier proposition is early season seeding of canola. Like all the crops we grow, canola tends to give us the best results if we can get it in the ground early. Late seeded canola is more at risk of being adversely affected by heat and dryness during the critical flowering stage. So canola seeding is a balancing act between the risk factors associated with seeding too late and seeding too early. The risk we take when seeding canola too early is that unlike the crops already discussed, canola has the growing point at the very top of the plant, where it is completely exposed to the environment - including sudden temperature drops and hard frosts. There is no coming back for a canola plant that has lost its growing point. That plant is dead.

Alberta Weather is Extremely Fickle.

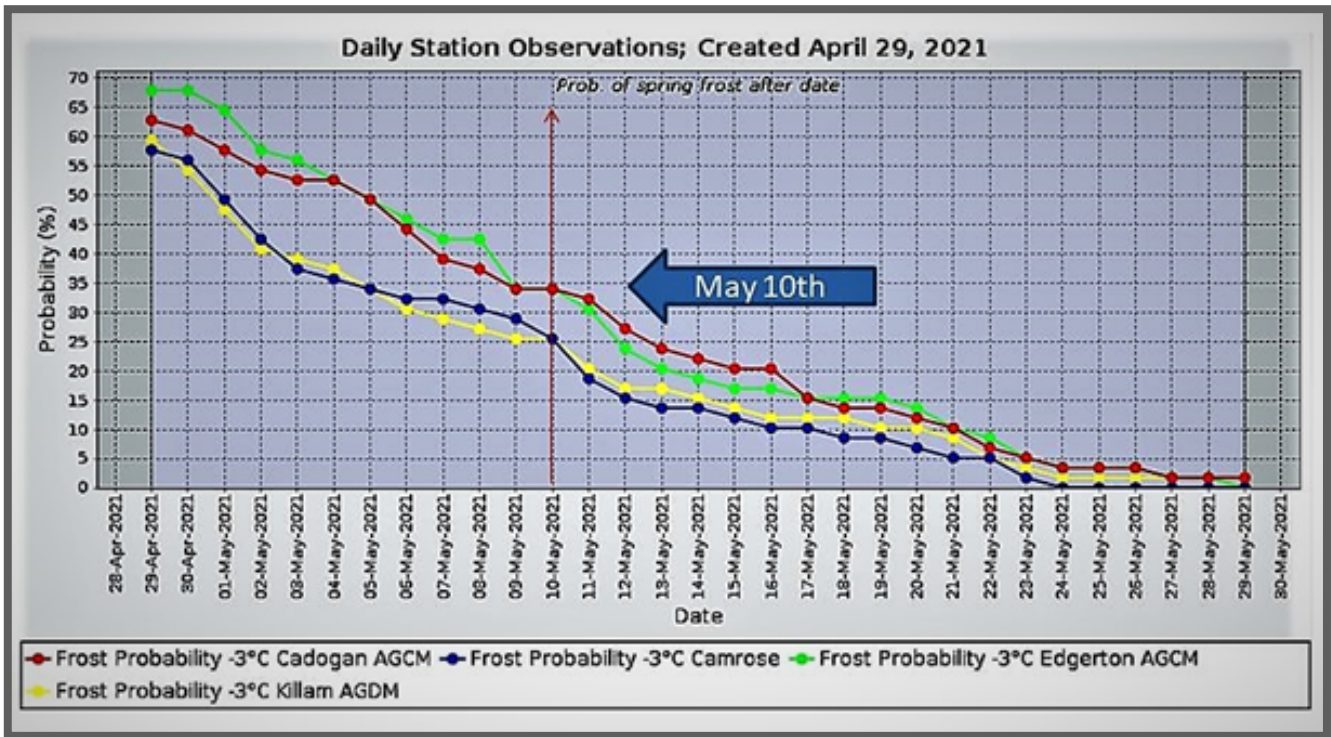
Access Weather Station Data Nearest To You

Depending on the seedbed temperature, the canola you put in the ground today will generally be emerging in 5 to 12 days, and it would be great to know what kind of environment it will be emerging into. Unfortunately, Alberta weather is extremely fickle, but there is a lot of weather station data going back many years to give us an idea about frost risk for our area. To access this data follow this link and click on the “normal” tab at the top;

<https://www.agric.gov.ab.ca/acis/weather-data-viewer.jsp>

Then you can pick your closest station, frost probability degree and your anticipated seeding window to get an idea how much frost risk you face based on the anticipated emergence date of the crop. There can be a surprisingly wide variance between stations. For example, Rosalind had a 50% chance of a -3C frost event until May 1st, while Edgerton (which is close to the same latitude) doesn't drop below a 50% risk until May 5th. You can see by the accompanying graph though, that by May 10th, the risk of a -3C frost event ranges from 25% to 35% across our area and declines rapidly over the next week. Soil moisture and temperature conditions will have a large impact on how fast canola emerges after seeding, but that tendency for risk to decline quickly seems to consistently start around May 10th, which is why I generally recommend starting canola seeding no earlier than May 3rd to 5th, regardless of what type of spring I am having. The canola seeded then should be emerging into the rapidly improving risk conditions found in the May 10th to 15th time period.





When you are talking about Alberta and the weather, there are no guarantees. However there are tools available that can help you to make informed decisions about how much risk you are taking on when you decide to seed early.



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