

## SOME TIPS FOR STARTING VEGETABLE, FLOWER SEEDS INDOORS

Some vegetable seeds, such as tomatoes, eggplants, peppers and cucumbers are easy for home gardeners to start indoors under lights or on a windowsill. A sturdy transplant can be ready for the garden in four to six weeks.

Trouble is most gardeners start them too early and end up with leggy, unhealthy-looking seedlings by mid-May.

Studies have shown that tomato seedlings with just two pairs of true leaves will not only catch up to, but surpass older plants during the season. Tomatoes and peppers started around the first of April should be garden-ready after danger of frost has passed.

Some seeds, especially those of onions, cabbages, cauliflower and broccoli, are more difficult for home gardeners. Even under lights, they take longer to produce than tomatoes or peppers, and sunny days on a windowsill are often too few to grow sturdy seedlings.

Unlike tomatoes, these vegetables cannot be planted deep if they get too leggy. Their crowns should be near the surface when replanted, so it's harder to get away with a leggy transplant. For this reason, a cold frame is indispensable for growing cabbages and broccoli from seed.

When starting your annual flowers, such as snap dragons, marigolds and zinnias, check the seed packet for the best time to sow the seeds indoors.

Each is different, and some take longer from seed than others. While most seeds germinate quickly, the seedlings may have to be transplanted several times before being put in the garden.

Don't be tempted to start root vegetables like carrots or beets indoors. When transplanted, the roots will never grow straight again.

Park Seed Co.'s Tom Thumb lettuce is fun to grow from seed. Excellent for container culture, sow the seeds of this lettuce at intervals so the small heads mature in succession rather than all at one time.

Seeds can be started in individual pots or flats. Dampen the soilless seed-starting mix first to avoid the problem of wetting it after the seeds are sown. In a large plastic bag, squeeze lukewarm water through the mix, or mix it with your hands in a large pot. Pour the dampened mix into a seed tray or pots and pat down firmly.

Make shallow troughs or rows in the prepared trays. Sprinkle the seeds sparingly, since transplanting will be difficult if the seedlings come up too close together. To cover the seeds, sift milled sphagnum moss evenly over the rows. Very tiny seeds should not be covered at all.

To water the tray, place in a pan of room temperature water until the soil mix is thoroughly moistened. Watering from above may dislodge the seeds, disrupting their spacing.

Make a label for each type of seed sown, including the variety and sowing date. Cover each tray with a pane of glass, or enclose it in a plastic bag. This step is important with tiny seeds, since the surface can dry out very quickly. Put the trays in a warm place.

Check the trays each day for germination and to make sure the surface is moist. Water from below if needed. When most of the seeds have germinated, remove the glass or plastic and move the seeds to a sunny window or light stand.

The seedlings should be transplanted to individual pots when the cotyledon leaves are formed and the first true leaves begin to appear. Pry the tiny plants apart, holding them by pinching the cotyledon leaves together. Do not hold them by the stem. At this stage, the seedlings will be about an inch tall.

If starting tomato and pepper seeds in individual pots, cut off the extra seedlings at the soil line with a pair of scissors rather than trying to transplant them. The roots of the seedlings which remain will not be disturbed, and the plants will grow faster.

Close attention should now be paid to watering and feeding. The soilless medium should be damp at all times, but not quite as wet as during germination. Always use room temperature water.

Feeding can be done at every watering, but dilute the fertilizer to half strength if this system is used. If the small plants begin to turn pale green or yellowish, increase the amount of food. Don't spare the fertilizer — soilless mixes contain no plant nutrients and the seedlings must be fed regularly during this fast-growth period. Use a balanced soluble fertilizer. (Organic)

If growing under lights, set an automatic timer to give the plants 14 to 16 hours of light a day. If you don't have lights, put them in the sunniest window possible. In four to six weeks, they'll be ready to harden off.

*Lindsay Totten Tips  
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## WEEDS AREN'T ALL BAD

1. They are deep divers and feeders. Through soil capillarity they help less hardy surface-feeding crops to withstand drought.

2. They bring minerals, particularly trace elements up from the subsoil and make them available to cash crops.

3. When used in rotation, they break up hardpan and allow crop roots to feed deeply.

4. They fiberize and condition the soil, providing a good environment for minute animal and plant life.

5. They are good indicators of soil fertility. Certain types appear when there are deficiencies.

6. Weeds store minerals and other valuable nutrients that would be washed, blown or leached away from bare ground.

## OUT OF THE ATTIC, BARN, TOOL SHED, BASEMENT, WORKPLACE

We've come to the conclusion that one needs money to supplement what you can't scrounge, salvage, build yourself or have donated. You'd be surprised how far a little cash goes, if you use it only to "fill-in." From time to time, *The Alternator*, will express its gratitude to those who have responded to our needs by donating special skills, materials and equipment.

This month we are offering our special thanks to: **Trudy Chandler** of **Total Travel, New Castle, PA** who recently donated \$17,000 worth of computing equipment: this includes a Honeywell Miniframe, a large printer, and five key-board monitors.

**John Balko** of **Ear, Nose, Throat and Allergy Associates of Greenville, PA** who donated a \$40,000 passive solar system.

**Bob Kobet** of **Energy Design Associates, Butler, PA** and **Doug Lodge, Contractor, Cochran, PA**, who volunteered their professional services to develop the renovation plan for the farmhouse.

**Darrell Fry, Sue Morrow, Dawn Shiner and Ted Simanek**, **Permaculture Design Consultants** who are volunteering their skill in refining and implementing the Permaculture Design.