

The Garden Corner

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Master Gardeners of Johnson County Missouri

Here we are in February! Spring isn't far off now – yippee! But we don't have to wait until spring to get our hands dirty. February is a good month to start your seeds indoors. When you buy your package of seeds, the information on the back of the packet will tell you when to plant. Let's take a quick example: The package says plant indoors six weeks before planting outside. Grab a calendar. Circle April 15th (tax day) – that's our average last day of frost. Count back six weeks and you have your planting date. If you decide to plant indoors, here are a few tips that will help make your adventure more successful.

The first item you want to consider is the container. You can use almost anything as long as it has good drainage holes. I've used paper egg crates in the past; but, have finally decided to invest in the plastic trays that are available everywhere.

Next – type of soil. Don't – Don't – Don't use the dirt from your garden or reuse old potting soil. You are asking for problems like “damping off” or “seed and seedling rot” from soil that will hold too much moisture or has diseases present. Take the time and expense to go buy some sterile potting soil just for seedlings. You'll be glad you did. One additional note: If your seedlings are up and doing well and then one morning you observe them all laying down, you have probably encountered “damping off”. If you purchased the recommended potting soil, the problem is one of over watering.

That's the next tip – watering. After planting, water thoroughly where the soil is moist; but, not soggy. Make certain you keep the soil moist all through the process. I've known folks who put plastic over their newly planted containers to keep the moisture and heat inside and it works for them; however, I've never done this.

Light and heat are two major factors contributing to your success. As a general rule, until overnight temperatures remain above 50 degrees, I keep everything on electrical heating mats – up to you. Light is another factor. Again, here's a caution: Don't use regular light bulbs – they produce too much heat. Fluorescent light is great and remains cool. Suspend your light fixture three to four inches above your plants and as they grow move you light up to maintain that distance.

Last step. Once the plants have achieved their second set of leaves, it's time to transplant them. Now you'll be glad you got new potting soil because the soil will be loose and it will be easy to tease the roots apart. After transplanting, you won't be far from planting in your garden – just remember to give your plants a little time to get acclimated to the outdoors. You're done!

For specific questions/comments/suggestions write: 370 NW 121 Rd., Warrensburg, MO 64093 or email: maandpak@embargmail.com and I'll get right back with you.