



Bucks Country Gardens

Seed Starting And Garden Conditioning

Many types of vegetable and flower seeds may be started early indoors to get a head start on the spring growing season. The highly controlled conditions we can provide indoors are a safe place for seeds to sprout and grow into sturdy, young plants before having to face the rigors of unpredictable weather conditions outside.

To determine just how early to sow various seeds indoors, check the seed packets or ask one of our sales staff. Different seeds sprout at different rates and grow at different rates so you will need to determine how much time will be necessary for the seedling to reach the desired size before planting outdoors. Also, many flowers and some vegetables should not be planted outside until almost mid-May, after danger of frost has passed, so you may not want to start too early.

CHOOSING YOUR SEED-GROWING CONTAINER

There are two main procedures used to start seeds. One entails sowing the seeds in rows in a large open tray then transplanting the seedlings to individual peat pots/inserts and allowed to develop without disturbance. However, this requires a great deal more space over a longer period of time. With either method, cover the seed trays with a plastic cover or plastic cling wrap to raise the humidity, which will aid in germination.

POTTING SOIL MIXES

It is important to use only sterilized seed-starting mixes (such as Peters Potting Soil, vermiculite or milled sphagnum moss). Soil from outside should not be used. Non-sterilized soil contains "damping-off" fungus, which will kill your seedlings.

SOWING, WATERING AND TEMPERATURES

Before planting your seeds in the growing mix, moisten the mix with warm water. Once the mix is thoroughly to gently settle the soil around the seeds. Mist whenever the soil surface begins to dry slightly; avoid heavy drenchings that may disturb the seeds. Finally, place the plastidome over the seed trays (or pots) to keep humidity high and in a few days you'll see the first signs of activity.

Most seeds will germinate at temperatures of 70-75 degrees F. If your home does not provide enough warmth you may use a heating cable to provide this necessary element. The plastic dome or covering (mentioned previously) will help maintain the warmth and humidity needed for germination. Remove this covering after germination has occurred.

LIGHT REQUIREMENTS

Direct sunlight is best but during winter's shorter daylight hours additional light should be supplied with fluorescent plant tubes. Place these tubes 6-inches above the seed trays and operate them 14-16 hours daily.

TRANSPLANTING

Once the little seedlings have emerged, remove the plastic dome. When their first two true leaves have developed transplant them to individual peat pots or plastic inserts for several weeks or growing before being placed outside.

CONDITIONING FOR TRANSPLANTING OUTDOORS

Before placing your young plants in their outdoor beds it is necessary to prepare them for the conditions they will have to face. Seedlings grown indoors will not have had the benefit of strong sunlight and breezes and will wither quickly if planted directly outdoors. Prepare them by setting the trays (or pots) in a shady, protected site for a few hours daily, bringing them in at night. Over a 1 to 2 week period, gradually subject them to increased amounts of sun and eventually leave them out overnight.

After this time period, they may be planted outdoors, though be sure there is no more frost expected. Water them thoroughly when transplanting and, if possible, make the move on an overcast day. We can suggest fertilizers and soil conditioners that will help yours young plants develop into healthy, beautiful flowers and productive vegetables. You'll find much enjoyment and satisfaction in knowing you grew them all YOURSELF!

GARDEN CONDITIONING

Whether you are starting your first garden or "opening up" for spring, soil preparation is essential to the survival of your new vegetable, herb or flower seeds. Following are several basic steps to help you get started.

- 1. DETERMINE THE GARDEN LOCATION:** An ideal location would be in a well-drained, sunny location that is accessible to your garden hose (for future waterings). Then, test your soil for its nutrient content. We have home soil test kits available for purchase or you may send your soil sample to the Co-operative Extension Agency for testing at a nominal fee. In either case, the test results will inform you as to which nutrients you may need to add to improve your soil quality. (For instance, you may need lime, nitrogen, potassium, etc.)
- 2. BLOCK OUT THE DIMENSIONS OF YOUR GARDEN:** Keep in mind the size garden you'll need to accommodate the amount of crops you intend on growing (refer to our VEGETABLE PLANTING GUIDE or your seed packets for spacing requirements.)
- 3. ROTOTILL THE SOIL:** If you are starting your first garden, it's best to lift the sod first and then rototill. Till the soil to a depth of 8 to 10 inches – making a fine textured surface for sowing your seeds.
- 4. DESIGN THE GARDEN:** Plot out the space you will need for each vegetable or flower variety you will be growing. You may decide to plant in straight rows or block out sections for each variety. For further reading on garden design we suggest reading the gardening books that are available in the garden center – or we'll help you design a basic layout for your garden.
- 5. ADD YOUR SEEDS** or transplant your seed-starting plants that you've grown this winter. As you sow the seeds into the soil, add an all-purpose fertilizer (such as 5-10-10 or 10-10-10) to give your plants a healthy start.
- 6. WATERING YOUR NEW CROP:** Gently mist over the newly-planted seeds but do not drench the soil. If you have transplanted seedlings (or store-bought cell-paks) you will want to water using an UP-START solution.

7. SPRING AND SUMMER WATERING MAINTENANCE: Depending on spring's unpredictable weather you may have to develop a watering program. If it rains only lightly you must supplement the water supply to your plants by hose, can waterings, or using a drip irrigation system. Ask us how to set up your watering system for best results. During the summer it is important not to let the soil crack and dry out as this may kill your crop. Remember to water thoroughly at least once a week in spring and summer.

8. MULCHING AND WEEDING: It may be necessary to add a thin layer of "mulch" during the summer months to reduce moisture loss in the soil. Grass clippings, straw, and other moisture-retaining materials should be placed around the plants. Mulching also benefits to keep weeds down.

Remember that these are basic guidelines to help you get your garden started. We have additional reading materials available for further, in-depth information regarding the harvesting of your vegetables, how to cut blooms, etc. If you have any questions, feel free to call us. We're here to help.