

HORTICULTURE NEWSLETTER

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Starting Vegetables from Seed

January is a good month to begin growing some vegetables and flowers from seed.

There are several things to consider when starting seeds. First you must start with quality seed. K-State Research and Extension has information on recommended flower and vegetable varieties for Kansas and the times to start growing seeds, so contact your local Extension office to get more information on the best varieties to plant and the requirements for specific seeds. You can also talk to your neighbors, friends and garden centers about what has worked well for them. Obtain your seeds from a reputable source including garden centers and seed catalogs.

Two dates you must be aware of are the date the seed needs to be planted, the number of weeks the plant takes to develop, and the date the plant needs to be transplanted into the garden. Cool-season crops such as broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower and onions should be transplanted into the garden from the end of March to the beginning of April-which means the seed should be started indoors about 8 weeks earlier at the end of January. Warm-season crops like tomatoes, peppers and most annual flowers are usually transplanted about May 10 and should be started indoors by seed during mid to late March.

It is not recommended to start your seeds in heavy garden soil. Use a media that is good for germination and keep it moist. You can even place plastic wrap over the container to help retain moisture if needed.

Pay close attention to light and temperature needs for the germinating seed. All plants will need enough light once germination occurs. Fluorescent fixtures are often used and do well if placed 2 to 4 inches from the plants and left on for 16 hours a day. Temperatures required to germinate seeds can vary, but usually range from 70 to 85 degrees. A heating mat can help keep temperatures consistently high enough for germination. Once germination has happened the temperature can be reduced to 65 to 70 degrees during the day and 55 to 60 degrees at night.

Remember to harden off your new plants before placing them in the garden. Gradually move them outdoors for longer periods of time a couple weeks before transplanting to ensure a good transition to the garden.

Some people ask about using old garden seed. This is a fine idea as many seeds will store for up to 3 years. You can actually test the germination rate of old seed by counting out 10 seeds and placing them between two moist paper towels and then placing them in a plastic bag with a few holes in it. Put the bag in a warm place and re-moisten the towels with water as needed to keep them moist. After 1 week check for germination. Remove the germinated seed and wait one more week to see if any more seeds germinate. Add the numbers together to determine the actual percent.



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