

## **EARLY SPRING GARDEN SEEDLINGS**

Now is the time to get a jump on early spring plants. Planting seeds indoors is an easy process as long as certain instructions are followed. This should result in strong, sturdy transplants to go directly into the home garden and be much less costly than buying plants.

A rule of thumb is to start seeds indoors six (6) weeks before planting time. While it is sometimes difficult to predict planting times since Oklahoma weather is so erratic, there are some tried-and-true methods.

The early crops most likely to benefit from planting seeds indoors are: spinach, lettuce, celery, onions. Also, brassica plants such as cabbage, broccoli and cauliflower also do well. On the other hand, root crops such as beans and peas do not.

Here is a schedule of vegetable crops to plant as seeds indoors now:

- 1. Cabbage- February 15- March 10**
- 2. Carrot- February 15- March 10**
- 3. Cauliflower- February 15- March 10**
- 4. Chard- February 15- March 10**
- 5. Kohlrabi- February 15- March 10**
- 6. Lettuce- February 15- March 10**
- 7. Onion- February 15- March 10**
- 8. Spinach- February 15- March 10**
- 9. Broccoli- March**

First, gather materials needed. Purchase seeds, making sure they are for the 2018 growing season. Disease-resistant seeds should be purchased. Several name brands offer them, such as Burpee. Do your research and ask questions. Read the instructions on the back of seed packages carefully as there is a lot of very good information contained there. Seed starting pots may vary but, perhaps, the easiest ones are pressed peat pots that can be planted directly into the ground along with the transplant. Egg cartons, small plastic pots, and ice trays can be used. These would need to be sterilized and holes punctured in the bottom for drainage. These are reusable and less costly. Containers can then be marked with pop-cycle sticks or sticky notes listing plant and planting date.

Next, buy seed starting soil (preferred) or make your own using sphagnum peat moss, vermiculite and perlite. To this, add dolomite limestone, superphosphate and calcium nitrate. This soil is very light and porous. Do NOT use garden soil or potting soil as it is not light and porous. Seeds can grow in a soilless environment, but would need extra fertilizer.

Indoor fertilizer and a spray mist bottle are all that is needed. Do not use a pitcher of water to keep from flooding the soil. Water is necessary to keep the seedlings hydrated.

The single most important item needed for seed starting success is light. A sunny window works fine unless the plants get too hot and wilt. Florescent lights will also work, but plants should not be placed too close plus there is an expense. LED grow lights have become popular as they are energy efficient, easy to install and provides low heat emission. Thus, plants can be placed closer to the light. LED is more expensive to buy than florescent lighting but lasts much longer so you will need to make the trade-off decision. Another method to use is a seed-warming mat that warms the soil and seed from the bottom up and maintains soil temperature.

## **THE PROJECT**

Let's get started with the project. The grower has a choice to plant in one pot or seed in flats and then transfer into larger pots before transplanting into the garden. Any transferring should be done carefully. Pick up the seedlings by leaves and not stems as stems tend to break easily.

Moisten the soil. Keep the optimum temperature range on soil and seeds. This should be about room temperature of 65-75 degrees. Add soil to flats or pots. Place two seeds per container, dropping them on top of soil in container. Gently press down with a pop-cycle stick, fertilize, and gently mist. Cover all the seeded containers with plastic wrap to retain moisture. Once the seeds sprout with the second leaf, remove the plastic wrap. Watch for damping off disease. This occurs when seedlings have excessive water, heat, and poor light. Should this occur, use a fungicide specifically made for this disease. Keep plants gently watered and fertilized. This is the time to transfer from a flat to a pot, removing one of the sprouts.

Use loose medium in the new pot, spray with the mister immediately and add fertilizer. After a few days, start the hardening off period. To harden off, gradually expose to outside conditions, starting in the shade and protected from the wind. Later, move pots into several hours of sun. Start this about a week before planting in the garden. Gradually lessen water and stop fertilizing at this point. Move plants in the garage at night if low temperatures warrant.

Now, it is time to plant in the garden. After the garden has been prepared and soil tested, dig a hole that is twice the circumference of the pot but not any deeper than the top of the pot. If using a pressed peat pot, cut the bottom of the pot so the roots will spread. Cover the top of the peat pot. Water and fertilize immediately being careful not to flood the plant. Enjoy the bounty!

For more information, refer to OSU fact sheets [HLA-6020](#), [HLA-6450](#), and [HLA-6013](#). And/or, feel free to call the Tulsa Master Gardeners office at 918-746-3701.