

Column Name - The Heartland Minute

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*“Ready, Set.....Grow? Getting an Early Start on the Growing Season”*

Many of our landscapes and have been cold and snow covered as of late, but in Kansas and surrounding areas, many gardeners are ready to get set up for garden season. Planning for and starting vegetable and flower transplants can make this a much more interesting time of year. The first of the year can be an ideal time for purchasing quality seed.

There are publications through K-State Research and Extension that serve as a guide for recommended vegetable varieties to help gardeners get started that are specific to Kansas. These plants have proven themselves across the state of Kansas and this is a good place to start when deciding what to plant. However, it is recommended to talk to your neighbors, friends, and your local garden center about what has worked well for them.

Most garden centers and seed catalogs are reputable sources for quality seeds. If choosing seeds from a business that does not specialize in plants, pay special attention to the package date to make sure the seed was packaged for the current year. Though most seeds remain viable for about three years, germination decreases as seeds age. Thus, buying current seed allows you to keep seed for a longer period of time with an expectation of good germination.

Determine the “Date to Seed” when purchasing seeds. Gardeners who start growing plants indoors should also know their target date for transplanting outside. For example, late March and early April is the target date for transplanting broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower and onions. Most annual flowers are not planted until May 10 or later.

Do not use garden soil to germinate seeds indoors. That soil is too heavy and may contain disease organisms. There are several seed starter medias available to use. Seeds must also be kept moist to germinate. Water seeds often enough so that the media never dries. Using a clear plastic wrap over the top of the container can reduce the amount of watering needed. Once the seedlings emerge, you can remove the wrap.

Many plants will germinate in darkness or light, but some require darkness only. All plants require adequate amounts of light once emergence occurs. South-facing windows may not provide enough light, so fluorescent or LED lights may be needed. The temperature best for germination is often higher than what we commonly keep inside homes. Moving the container towards the ceiling or top of a refrigerator can help, but a heating mat is best for consistent germination.

Another helpful hint is that plants react to movement. Brushing over the plants with your hand stimulates them to become stockier and less ‘leggy’. You might try 20 brushing strokes per day. You can harden plants by moving them outside and exposing them to sun and wind before

transplanting occurs. Start gradually two weeks out and increase the number of hours and degrees of exposure over the two-week period.

Information comes from Kansas State University horticulture expert, Cynthia Domenghini.

For more information regarding upcoming programs, Agriculture and Natural Resources, 4-H Youth Development, or K-State Research and Extension call the office at 620-583-7455, email me, Ben Sims, at [benjam63@ksu.edu](mailto:benjam63@ksu.edu), or stop by the office which is located inside the courthouse. Be sure to follow K-State Research and Extension- Greenwood County on Facebook for the most up-to-date information on Extension education programs and the Greenwood County 4-H program.