

THE EDIBLE GARDEN

JANUARY 2016

HEAD STARTS—DEADLINES FOR SEEDING



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Dale Odorizzi
Master Gardener of Lanark County

Why should I bother starting my own transplants? I can go to any garden centre and purchase all I want. Its hard and its messy and takes a lot of TLC to grow your own plants.

I have many reasons for starting my own plants:

- More choice from a seed catalogue than buying plants at the store
- Heirloom seeds from local seed exchanges
- Grow something before the snow is off the ground
- Pride in knowing that the produce from my garden started from a few packages of seeds.

Growing transplants is not difficult. Start with a moist soilless medium that contains a combination of peat, sand and perlite or vermiculite in clean pots or containers that drain well. Check your seed packet for directions. Plant the seeds in this mixture. A rule of thumb is to plant the seeds two to three times as deep as the seeds are wide. Cover the seedlings with clear plastic or a clear dome and place in a warm spot. Once the seedlings emerge, remove the plastic and place trays under fluorescent lights or next to a bright window. Keep the lights on 14-16 hours per day. Feed the seedlings every two weeks with a weak liquid fertilizer. Water plants from the bottom but do not overwater and make sure the seedlings do not sit in water. Transplant seedlings to larger containers after true leaves appear. Do not overcrowd seedlings. Plants in the Tomato Family do best if they are planted and replanted.

Seed packets and instructions often refer to Average Last Frost Date. Find yours at <http://www.plantmaps.com/interactive-ontario-last-frost-date-map.php>

CABBAGE FAMILY—Broccoli, Cabbage, Brussels Sprouts, Cauliflower, Rutabaga and Radish—Plants in this family can be directly sowed outdoors in early spring. To get an even earlier crop, start some seeds indoors in early spring. Transplants can be set out from early April until the end of May. In August, you can set out another crop that has been started 4-6 weeks earlier. Brussels Sprouts take longer to mature and are not suitable for fall planting. Radish, a member of this family, can be planted as soon as the ground can be worked and does not benefit from starting indoors. Keep planting until it starts to get too warm and plant again late August or early September.

SQUASH FAMILY—Cucumbers, Melons, Winter Squash and Summer Squash—Seed directly in the garden after all danger of frost is passed and the soil is warm. To get an earlier crop, start seeds indoors in peat pots 3-4 weeks prior to setting out. The Squash Family transplants must be handled very gently to avoid damage to their root systems. Thin seedlings by cutting them off to avoid damage to other plants. Put “Kozy Coats” or Floating Row Covers over the Squash Family seeds and seedlings. They help to keep the soil warm and keep



Cucumber seedlings in Kozy Coat
Dale Odorizzi

HOW I GROW TOMATOES FROM SEED

Helen Halpenny
Master Gardener of Lanark County

By mid-winter many gardeners get ‘the itch’ to start growing plants. If tomato plants are on your list, resist that urge until at least the beginning of April. Seedlings started too early will become tall and spindly, and you will have to look after them indoors longer.

It is a satisfying activity to browse seed catalogues during winter and decide what varieties you need. Tomato seeds remain viable for several years if stored in a cool, dark dry location so check out left over seeds before you order more. I like to grow several varieties- small cherry type (both yellow and red), an early maturing kind, a paste type, a large meaty variety that will fill the slice of bread, and experiment with a couple of heirloom varieties. Tomatoes are either determinate or indeterminate. Determinate varieties are pre-programmed to produce fruit which ripens more or less at the same time. Vines are short and don’t require support. Indeterminate ones continue to grow and produce fruit as long as growing conditions allow, thus producing over a longer period of time. They need staking.

I prefer to start my plants in pots of sterile soilless mix, planting seeds about three times as deep as their width. Cover the moist mix with plastic and give bottom heat, I use an old heating pad set on ‘low’. Seedlings will emerge in 8-10 days. It is always a thrill to see this happen. No fertilizer is required until the seedlings get their true leaves. My seedlings grow under fluorescent lights in my basement. I use one warm white and one cool white bulb. This gives a wide spectrum of light that they seem to like. ‘Grow lights’ are available

Cucumber Beetles away from the new plants.

TOMATO FAMILY—Tomatoes, Peppers, Eggplant—These warm weather crops must be started indoors 6-10 weeks before the average frost-free date. Because you start your seeds early, they will require transplanting into larger pots. Every time you transplant, remove a few lower leaves and set the plant more deeply in the soil. Tomatoes love to be transplanted, repeatedly. See companion article. Do not set out transplants until the soil has thoroughly warmed. Although many people in Eastern Ontario religiously put out their Tomato plants on the May long weekend, they risk losing their crop to a late frost. Hold off until early June. Try an experiment and plant a few plants early and others in June. Even without a frost, your June plants will catch up and may even pass your May plants. Potatoes are another member of this family. They do well by planting directly into the garden.

ONION FAMILY—Garlic, Leeks, Onions—The three members of this family require different starting treatment.

Garlic—Plant cloves in October and mulch well. They will be ready to harvest at the end of July. If you did not get around to planting in the fall, you can plant in the spring. They will produce smaller bulbs and may not be suitable for drying and storage. They will provide delicious “Green Garlic”. In fact, if you have any sprouting garlic from last season in the spring, plant it and use until your new crop is ready.

Leeks—Start seeds indoors for early spring transplants. Transplant seedlings deeply to produce the long, thick, blanched stems. Mulch well. With good mulching, they can be left in the ground and harvested throughout the winter.

Onions—Use sets, seeds or transplants. Start seeds indoors 8 weeks before setting out. If you start seeds outdoors, you will not get good storage onions. Use a cell pack and put 3 seeds in each cell. When it is time to set the plants out, plant each cell 2.5-5 cm apart. Use one or two of each onion as green onions and leave the third plant to mature.

ASTER FAMILY—Lettuce—Lettuce is a cool season crop that has different types and different dates to maturity.

Crisphead—Iceberg type that requires long, cool growing season. Start seed indoors in late winter and transplant in early spring. Apply mulch to stabilize soil temperature. Cover with floating row cover to reduce heat.

Cos or Romaine—Nutritious and easy to grow. Start indoors in late winter and transplant in early spring.

Leaf—Fast growing and long lasting. Direct sow as soon as ground can be worked or start seedlings indoors 4 weeks prior to planting out for earlier crop. Continue starting indoors and planting out. Does not germinate well in high temperatures.

Butterhead or Bibb or Boston—This is another good choice for succession planting. Sow outdoors as soon as ground can be worked. Start indoors for a longer season or to start in midsummer when temperatures are high.

Other vegetables do not benefit from earlier starting indoors and do better directly planted into the garden.

So what can you do now in January? Review the December 2015 Edible Garden Newsletter to remind you of what you need to grow seeds. Set up your gardening calendar—either electronically or on paper. Mark the dates for starting each of your plants so you are ready for spring (see page 3). Plan to visit a local Seedy Saturday and order your seeds. The days are getting longer and Spring is not too far away.

DID YOU KNOW

- A seed is a plant embryo with stored food inside a protective coat.
- Germination is stimulated when moisture is absorbed hence the importance of ensuring the seed is in contact with the soil. Warmth is also necessary.
- First to emerge from the seed is a root (radicle) growing downwards. This continues to grow elongating, forming root hairs and branches.
- Next the stem (hypocotyl) and one or more often two leaf like structures (cotyledons) push up through the soil, open, turn green.
- A few days later the young plant grows its first true leaves.

but cost more. A timer can be set to supply about fourteen hours of light per day. It is important to keep plants within 10 cm of the light source.

In a few weeks, transplant to give plants more growing room. Never over water, as that can contribute to damping off. An all-purpose water soluble fertilizer at half strength is fine. Fish emulsion also works well. I find it beneficial to run a fan nearby each day for an hour or so to increase air circulation. The air flow makes stems grow sturdy.

By mid-May plants can be introduced to the outdoors gradually. This process entails taking plants to shady outdoors and moving to sunlight over the course of ten days. If nights are cool, bring the plants indoors at night time. After the hardening off process, choose a cloudy day to transplant tomatoes in the garden and protect them from the elements with plastic covers or shingles to help them transition to harsher conditions.

If your plants are too tall, strip off the lower leaves and plant them deep up to the topmost leaves. The stems have the ability to grow roots from the nodes on their stems. This will result in an enhanced root system. By the end of June, when the soil is warm, it is beneficial to apply 5-7 cm of mulch to help maintain soil moisture, and control weeds.

If you are providing support for your tomatoes, make it sturdy. Retying vines will be ongoing. A side dressing of fertilizer will aid fruiting. At the same time keep a watch out for pests and diseases. The tomato hornworm is a monster. Aphids can sometimes cause damage. Blossom end rot is caused by a deficiency of calcium in the fruit and worsens in unfavourable growing conditions, especially drought. Early and late blight can devastate your tomato crop. To help prevent this disease, plant tomatoes in different areas of the garden each year, as disease spores can over winter in the soil. I choose some varieties that are resistant to disease.

Tasty garden-grown tomatoes are one of the joys of summer. It is amazing that up until the nineteenth century they were considered to be poisonous.

Note—Helen’s tomato plants are always sturdy and the first to sell out at plant sales.

WHEN TO START YOUR TRANSPLANTS

Vegetable	Start Transplant	Direct Seeding
Basil	Start May & June. Transplant out June & July	Plant June & July
Bush Beans	No need to start indoors	Plant late May to Mid-July, every 2 weeks. Plant for Thanksgiving late August
Dried Beans		Plant Late May
Pole Beans		Plant Late May
Beets	April to June. Transplant out April-July	May & June
Broccoli	April to June. Transplant out May to early June	May & June
Cabbage	May. Transplant early June	May
Carrots		Direct Seed in May
Cauliflower	April to June. Transplant out May to early June	May & June
Coriander		April to August
Corn		Mid May to June
Cucumber	Early May. Transplant in June	Late May
Eggplant	March. Transplant in June	
Garlic		October
Green Onions	March to July	April to July
Kale	June and July	June and July
Lettuce	March to July. Transplant April to August.	April and May and then Late July
Melons	Early May. Transplant early June	
Onions	February to early March. Transplant Mid April	Onion sets in April
Peas		April and May
Peppers	Start early March. Transplant June	
Potatoes		May and June
Radish		April and May and then August
Rutabaga	Mid May. Transplant early June	Plant in May
Salad Greens		April to September
Spinach	Start March, April and July. Plant in April, May and August	Plant April, May and August
Swiss Chard	April. Transplant May	Plant in May
Tomatoes	Late March. Transplant in June	
Turnip		April, May and August
Winter Squash	Early May. Transplant in June	Plant Late May or early June.
Zucchini	Start May. Transplant in June	Late May

Watch for *Trowel Talk* the Master Gardeners of Ottawa Carleton electronic monthly gardening newsletter available on the 15th at <http://mgottawa.mgoi.ca/>
 Visit the Almonte online community newspaper 'The Millstone' - <http://millstonenews.com/> - for a column by David Hinks of the Ottawa Carleton Master Gardeners; under the Gardening tab

Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton and Master Gardeners of Lanark County are member groups of Master Gardeners of Ontario Inc., a registered charity with the mission of providing gardening advice to homeowners
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