

Winter is the season for indoor gardening



Some varieties of tomatoes will grow indoors over the Winter months.

DOYLESTOWN - With the close of the growing season outdoors in much of the United States, gardening moves inside for the Winter months. Many folks have only a few pots of ivy, philodendron and other foliage plants to decorate in their homes. Attractive and fresh as these are, they are missing a lot of fun, color, variety and yes, even a taste treat if they don't garden from seeds on sunny window sills or under plant lights.

"Pixie Hybrid Tomato, Nugget Marigolds and Carefree Coleus all grow well inside from seeds sown now or before New Year's", says Jeanette Lowe, Burpee Seed Company horticulturist and avid home gardener. "I start some seeds every year about this time; I just have average growing conditions on sunny windowsills. My rather unusual houseplants, are the talk of my guests. Plant lights can create "sunshine" if you don't have sufficient natural light, but I have great success with only sunlight."

Planting formula or peat pellets are ideal for indoor planting. One can fill small pots, about four inches across, to the top with planting formula and press down gently. A person should plant two or three marigold or tomato seeds to each pot or pellet, covering lightly and keeping evenly moist. At average room temperature, seeds sprout in about a week to ten days. Young seedlings need to get all the sunshine possible, either natural or artificial. Pots or pellets on windowsills should be elevated so runs are at least on a level with the glass panes. This helps prevent seedlings from getting spindly reaching up for light. If one uses plant lights, one should adjust them four to six inches above the tops of plants, turning them on for twelve to sixteen hours per day, off at night.

Extra seedlings should be transplanted or snipped out to leave just the strongest one to each pot or pellet. Some marigolds grow to

blooming size very nicely in 4-inch pots or pellets. The tomatoes eventually need more root room, and should be shifted to containers at least six inches wide and deep.

Coleus seeds are tiny; they should be sprinkled over the surface of planting formula and barely covered. It may be two weeks or more before small, all-green leaves appear. Locked in the "coleus computer" are hundreds of amazing different color and pattern designs, which start showing with the second pair of leaves. When the seedlings are big enough to handle, one can select those that are best to transplant to four-inch containers.

Plant should be watered thoroughly so the excess comes out the drainage hole of the pot or the bottom of the pellet into the saucer below.

After about five minutes, this excess should be poured off. One can water again when the surface of the planting material feels dry to touch. This may be every day, or every few days depending on "weather" conditions indoors and out. During bright sunny days plants will dry out much faster than in dull weather.

Planting formula, pellets and special potting mixtures contain nutrients, but eventually these need replacing. It's wise practice for one to apply a water-soluble fertilizer according to manufacturer's directions, to houseplants about once every two weeks.

Marigolds start bursting into bloom in February or

early March. The sooner one starts seeds, the faster the plants will usually begin to flower, especially as the hours of sunlight lengthen toward Spring. The tomatoes, now a stocky foot or so tall, attract attention, too, with their blossom clusters. These should be tapped with a pencil or finger to help them pollinate. Soon little green fruits appear which swell in a few weeks to bright red juicy tomatoes the size of ping pong balls. The developing load of fruits is heavy, so the plants need support. One can insert a sturdy stake alongside each stem and tie up the branches with soft twine. A person may prefer three stakes evenly spaced around the pot edge.

It should be a thrill for everyone to enjoy the beauty and color of Summer indoors in Winter and early Spring. Perhaps best of all, however, is when one can pop freshly-picked tomatoes into his mouth or into his favorite salad.

Now is a good time to start indoor gardening fun from seeds. One can still order from the full selection of varieties listed in Burpee's Spring Gardening Catalog; seed starting supplies from Burpee's Fall Bulb & Gift Ideas Catalog. To be sure of getting future issues, one may send his name and address to the Burpee Branch Office nearest you: Warminster, Pa. 18974; Clinton, Ia. 52732; Riverside, Ca. 92502.

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