

# Start your garden now

DOYLESTOWN — Are you getting "itchy fingers" to start some gardening? In many areas of the United States, especially the north, you can begin from late February into March. This is the prime time to sow seeds indoors for vegetables and flowers that need a headstart to get them up and growing.

Seedlings of most varieties take about 6 to 10 weeks to develop into transplants ready for the outdoor garden. Exceptions are begonias and geraniums which should be grown inside longer.

You think you don't have a good place to start seeds indoors, or you've had disappointments before?

"This year you can have fun and be successful," says Jeannette Lowe, Horticulturist with the W. Atlee Burpee Co. "A greenhouse is an ideal place to start seedlings, but I don't have one. Like most gardeners, I start seeds on my sunniest windowsills and under plant lights. I do provide the few essentials necessary for good germination (sprouting) of the seeds and growth of the plants, but they don't get any pampering." Here are Miss Lowe's pointers for you to follow for success.

Concentrate on varieties that need headstart. These include flowers and vegetables with tiny seeds, or which take a long time to develop into flowering or producing plants. Three important flowers are Impatiens, Petunias and Snapdragons, especially the glamorous Liberty Bells Hybrid Snapdragons.

If you have plenty of room and ambition, consider Asters, Begonias, Coleus, Bedding Dahlias, Geraniums, Salvia and Vinca rosea (Periwinkle) Hybrid Marigold—Climax, Ladies, Nuggets and the new Fireworks—usually produce more plants from each packet of seeds if sown inside. The same is true of Hybrid Zinnias, including Zeniths, Bouquets, Peter Pans and debutante Pink Splendor

Hybrid Zinnias and Marigolds grow so fast, however, that a 5 to 6 week indoor headstart is plenty long enough for them.

In vegetables Tomatoes are a "must", especially hybrids including Burpee's Big Girl Hybrid VF, Supersteak Hybrid VFN and Burpee's new Early Pick Hybrid VF. Other vegetables that need a headstart include Broccoli, Cabbage, Cauliflower, Eggplant, Head Lettuce, Onions and Peppers.

Grow your own plants and you'll have the best varieties, and the exact ones you prefer, for your garden. That's one of the biggest benefits of starting your own seeds. You don't have to depend on what may be available at garden marts later on.

If you're lucky enough to have a greenhouse, that's the ideal place to grow seedlings. In the average house or apartment, however, you can arrange a suitable place or "nursery". Windowsills that get sunshine and good light most of the day, where temperature runs about 65 to 75°F or a little cooler at night, are fine.

No bright windowsills? You can create "sunshine" at the flick of a switch with plant lights, or fluorescent light tubes hung about 3 to 6 inches above the tops of the plants on a table or bench. With these lamps turned on 12 to 16 hours a day (off at night), a dark corner or a moderately warm, airy basement can double as a greenhouse or hotbed. An automatic timer to turn the lights on and off saves work in tending the seedlings and also lets you go away for a day or weekend now and then.

With the "nursery" arranged, you're ready to sow seeds, in sterile planting material. Do not use garden soil unless you bake it first in a 180°F oven for 30 to 45 minutes to kill fungus organisms that often cause germination (sprouting) failures of seeds or Damping Off, the sudden collapse

and death of seedlings. Let soil cool before using.

The easiest, safest and most successful way to start seeds is to use some of the sterile seed-starting aids on the market. Burpee's Early Start Kit supplies all the essentials: peat pots and seed-sowing trays, a plastic tray to hold them, planting formula in which to sow seeds, and label stakes. Jiffy-7 Peat Pellets, Ferti-Cubes, and Seed 'n Start Planting Trays also work well. Follow the directions that come with them.

Sow larger types of seeds just deep enough to be hidden from view. Scatter fine seeds, including begonias and petunias, over the

surface of the planting material and press them in very lightly. Too deep sowing often results in poor germination (sprouting) of tiny-seeded varieties.


Also some, such as petunias, need the stimulus of light to come up well. Label each variety with name and date of sowing. Keep the planting material slightly moist all the time, but not soaked. Use a misty spray that does not dislodge seeds or seedlings.

As soon as shoots appear, grow the seedlings in your bright, airy but not drafty "nursery". Elevate containers on windowsills to the level of the glass panes so the tiny plants won't have to stretch for the light. Also turn them around each

day so they will grow straight. It's a combination of sufficient light, moderate temperatures, (60 to 70°F), enough but not too much water and ample growing space, that results in sturdy, dark green seedlings.

If you started your seeds in Jiffy-7's, Ferti-Cubes or other individual containers, thin or snip to the one best seedling in each. Come spring, you can move the plants to the garden with minimal disturbance to the roots. If you sowed seeds in flats (shallow boxes with drainage holes in the bottom), trays or pots, transplant the seedlings to roomier quarters when they have at least two pairs

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The GT-77 (shown right) has been promoted from a garden tractor/seedler (shown) to a farm seeder. Many are putting this seeder on ATVs, 3-wheel Motor Bikes with flotation tires and an assortment of vehicles to get the seeding done when ground is wet and soft. Why not have fun while doing your seeding?

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