

Annual plants for the summer garden can be started easily indoors! In short growing seasons, this extra growing time allows longer enjoyment of flowers and longer vegetable production! Seed Starting is great for all ages, educational, entertaining and economical!

It is safe to consider Memorial Day as the date you will be ready to plant. Typically this is the last frost date in Michigan. You must plan ahead to avoid plants that get too tall, leggy, or crowded. Starting seeds at the correct time will help you avoid these problems. Each flower and vegetable has a date to plant on the back of the package. Seed packets indicate when to start seeds by the amount of weeks before last frost date (ex. Start indoors 4-6 weeks before last frost date). Simply count back on the calendar that amount of weeks from Memorial Day, and start your seeds that week.

Feb 1st -21th: Begonias, Geraniums, Lantanas, Periwinkle, Vinka

Feb 21st -27th: Brussel Sprouts; Carnations, Coleus, Datura, Petunias (Dbl), Salvia, Snapdragons (Dbl)

Feb 28th -March 6th: Artichokes and Cauliflower (transplant out four weeks before the last frost date)

March 7th -13th: Celery and lemongrass; Cosmos, Dahlias, Impatiens, Lobelia, Larkspur, Petunias (Sngl)

March 14th -20th: Broccoli, Cabbage and Kohlrabi (transplant out four weeks before the last frost date); Ageratum, Alyssum, Asters, Phlox

March 21st -27th: Chives, Chili Peppers, Eggplant, Sweet Peppers, Sage, Stevia, Thyme and Tomatoes; Morning Glory, Celosia, Huchera, and Coreopsis

April 4th -April 10th: Asparagus, Basil, Fennel, Rhubarb, Shallots, and Tomatillos; 'Nepeta' Catmint, Euphorbia, Forget-Me-Nots, Marigolds, Portulaca, Single Snapdragons, Zinnias

April 18th -24th: Cucumbers, *Melons, *Squashes

* Start in plantable peat pots only; thin to 1 or 2 plants

Equipment needed:

Peat pots: Peat pots are useful because you can plant the whole pot when transplanting, reducing the risk of root shock and damage.

Flats: Available in many sizes, some with removable cells. Provide maximum efficiency for space.

Humidity Dome: It is mandatory to provide humidity to young seedlings. A dome protects against temperature fluctuations.

Fluorescent light: Provides steady even light that will not burn seedlings. Seedlings get long and stringy if not enough light/ too much heat.

Heat Mat: Seeds need soil temps to be between 65-75 degrees to germinate. Using a heat pad increases germination rates.

Drip Tray: Convenient to collect water and to water plants from the bottom to prevent damage to tender plants.

Seed Starting Soil or Pre-Filled Soil Flat: Sterilized soil with pre-mixed perlite and vermiculite. Never use garden or potting soil.

Fertilizer: Seed starting soil has no nutrients. Start fertilizing after second true leaf (not cotyledons) have emerged. Feed at 1/2 strength twice weekly for 3 to 4 weeks, then full strength every 10-12 days.

Seed Starting Tips:

Water:

When planting seeds make sure your soil medium is wet. Never let your seeds dry out, and never drown them in too much water. Soil should be moist to the touch. It is best to water in the morning. If your water contains chlorine, let it stand overnight before using. You may want to use a water mister to avoid over-watering.

Light:

The most ideal conditions for growing seeds is by using a fluorescent grow lamp. Use a cool white 40-watt bulb, or specially designed grow lights. Seedlings should get 12-14 hours of light a day. Bulbs should hang no more than 3 inches from the top of the seedlings. Do not put under lights or sunlight until cotyledons (baby leaves) have been out of soil for at least 1 day. This may burn the tender tissues of your new seedling.

Getting Ready to Plant Outside:

You will need to "toughen up" your seeds before planting. Outside is a harsh environment with drastic climate changes through the day. Two weeks before their plant date, reduce the amount of water you have been giving them. Stop feeding them. One week before transplanting, start setting your flats outside in a shaded area for half of the day. Do not set in the sun. Partially remove your dome for air flow. As the week moves on, leave out longer each day and if possible slightly increase sun exposure. Gradually, they can stay out over-night. Make sure to bring you seedling in if there are freezing temperatures overnight! Transplant outside after last frost date.

