

INSIDE GRUNDY COUNTY
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Over the past seven weeks, our master gardener class has covered many horticulture topics such as botany, soils, entomology, animal ecology, fruits, turf management, garden design, etc. The class has had an opportunity to learn important research based information about horticulture which will enable them to help you with horticulture questions you may have. Besides giving you a little flavor for what we have been studying, I thought this would be a great time to get you thinking about planning your garden. If you are planning on having a vegetable garden this year, you may want to get some of your plants started indoors now. This column will briefly cover some of the things you may want to do to get started.

One of the advantages of starting seeds indoors is you can lengthen the growing season. With transplants, you can also lessen the hazards that birds, insects, rains and weed competition give when seeds are grown directly outside. You need the following factors to successfully start plants indoors. First you need quality seed. It is recommended that you start with new seeds each year. Old seeds are not likely to germinate as well as new seeds. Check seed packets for the following plant and variety information: size, color, disease resistance and site preference. For selecting vegetables, you may want to refer to Suggested Vegetable Varieties for The Home Garden (PM 607).

When starting your plants indoors, you will want to use a well drained, disease-free growing medium. Garden centers have specially prepared soilless mixtures such as Jiffy Mix or Redi-earth. You can make a soil mix at home by using equal parts of garden loam, peat moss, and perlite. To guard against diseases, such as damping off, homemade mixtures should be

pasteurized before use. You may want to read *Soils For Houseplants (PM 713f)* for more detailed information.

You will want the containers you use to be clean, sturdy and of a size that fits the area they will be placed in. Some examples include wood flats, plastic trays, and clay and plastic pots. Plants that are easy to transplant can be seeded densely in flats, trays or pots and then later transplanted into individual pots or into wider spacing in flats.

When it comes to seeding the plants in the container, refer to the seed package for spacing and depth recommendations. If using flats, make the rows two inches apart. Label containers with plastic or wooden markers to identify the plants/varieties. After the seeds are planted, you will want to water with a fine mist. Then cover with a clear plastic wrap or clear plastic dome. Do not moisten again until the seeds sprout. Next, place the containers in a bright location but not in direct sunlight. Remove the plastic covering as soon as germination occurs.

This was an abbreviated overview of the steps needed to start plants indoors. For more complete information, go to ISU Extension's homepage and click on publications on the left side of the page, then click on *PM 874 Starting Garden Transplants at Home* or call the Grundy office of ISU Extension at 319-824-6979. I hope this has at least stimulated your thoughts of spring and the preparation for your garden. This is a great way to help pass the winter time blues as you look ahead to the warmer days of spring and summer.

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