

**INSIDE GRUNDY COUNTY**  
**by Bill Arndorfer**  
**Grundy County Extension Education Director**  
**February 3, 2006**

If you are an avid gardener and can't wait to plant your flowers and vegetables this spring, you could get a head start on the planting season by starting seedlings indoors. This past week a seed starting workshop was hosted by Grundy County Extension and this column will briefly highlight some of the key points that were made.

One of the reasons for starting seeds indoors is to lengthen the growing season and lessen the hazards that birds, insects, rain and weed competition give when seeds are grown directly outside. To successfully start plants indoors 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 seedlings indoors 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 your own soil mix 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 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.

Recommended sowing dates for several popular flowers and vegetables in Iowa are: late January - geranium; late February - impatiens and begonia; early March - cabbage, broccoli and cauliflower; mid-March - pepper, eggplant, petunia, and salvia; late March tomato, marigold, and zinnia; and early April - muskmelon, watermelon, squash, and cucumber. If unsure of the sowing date, check the seed packet.

This was a brief review of the steps needed to start seedlings indoors. For more complete information, call the Grundy office of ISU Extension at 319-824-6979 and ask for publication PM 874 Starting Garden Transplants.