

INSIDE GRUNDY COUNTY
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Even though it is cold outside, you can still begin your garden inside. You can get a jump on planting by starting your vegetables and annual flowers indoors now. 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.

Start with quality seed. It is best to start with new seeds each year. Old seeds are not likely to germinate as well. Check seed packets for the following plant and variety information: size, color, disease resistance and site preference. For selecting vegetables, refer to Suggested Vegetable Varieties for The Home Garden (PM 607).

When starting plants 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 a soil mix at home by using equal parts of garden loam, sphagnum peat moss and perlite. To guard against diseases, such as damping off, homemade mixtures should be pasteurized before use. To accomplish this, lightly moisten the soil mix, place in a shallow baking pan and bake in the oven at 180 degrees Fahrenheit for 30 minutes. The baking soil will produce a strong odor.

Use containers that are clean, sturdy and of a size that fits the area they will be placed in. 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 planting the seed, 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, water with a fine mist and then cover with a clear plastic wrap or clear plastic dome. Do not moisten again until the seeds sprout (germination times will vary). Next, place the containers in a bright location but not in direct sunlight. Remove the plastic covering as soon as germination occurs.

Seedlings must be transplanted from flats or trays into individual containers shortly after the second pair of leaves appear. Use a knife or spatula to dig plants. Replanting is best done when the soil is slightly dry. Handle the seedlings by their leaves, not their stems. Peat pots, compressed peat pellets or paper pots work well for transplants as they can be planted directly into the garden.

For more information, call the Grundy office of ISU Extension at 319-824-6979 and ask for publication PM 874 - Starting Garden Transplants at Home. Starting annual flowers and vegetables indoors is a great way to help pass the winter time blues.