

Starting vegetables from *seeds*



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For The News-Review

Question: I'd like to try starting my own vegetables from seeds this year. Can you give me some tips on ways to do that?

Answer: It's hard to believe we are well into the new year and the yard is starting to come to life with the sounds of birds chirping and tree buds forming. Although we spent the last few months day-dreaming of what we intend our garden to be, February is the perfect time to start making those dreams a reality. Where to start?

1. PLAN YOUR GARDEN

You don't have to be a professional to plan your next garden space. Whether you are working with a windowsill or a quarter acre, you must first ask yourself one very important question: what are you going to eat? Write your favorites down.

Do some digging to see what varieties do best in your region (Zones 8b-9a). Look at the back of seed packets to see what the light requirements are and see if it suits your specific space. When deciding when to plant your seeds, look at the germination rate and count backwards. This will allow you the opportunity to organize your plants based on germination.

2. ORGANIZE YOUR EQUIPMENT

Next, you'll want to organize your equipment and prepare for the task at hand. Starting with the basics, you will need recycled small containers or seed starting trays, soil, labels and a spray bottle.

The seed cell trays can be found at most garden supply stores this time of year, as well as specific seed starting soils designed to help your little seeds sprout. You may also find items such as seeding heat mats, grow lights and soil temperature probes very useful tools, however, they are not entirely necessary.

3. SOW

Once you have a plan and your seed packets organized, it's time to plant. The back of your seed packets should have the information needed regarding the depth where your seeds should be planted. If you don't



MACKENZI HALL/FOR THE NEWS-REVIEW

Potted pepper plants.

have access to the packet, a good rule of thumb is to create a hole that is twice the size of the seed.

Make sure to moisten your soil, but do not flood the container. I have found a spray bottle to be a great tool for watering delicate sprouts. Now, most seed trays will come with a plastic greenhouse style lid, however, it is just as acceptable to use a sheet of plastic wrap, poked with a few holes; this will trap moisture and heat until your seeds germinate.

Once you see sprouts, be sure to remove your cover to avoid mold and to allow your plants the room they need to grow. Set your seeds under your grow light or near a sunny window and start the countdown.

4. CARE

It won't be long before your little sprouts will be taking over the containers they were started in. As hard as it is to wait, it will benefit you greatly to plant your veggies outside once all danger of frost has passed. The last average frost date for our area is typically April 1.

Warm weather veggies like beans, corn and tomatoes will need soil temperatures of 60 degrees Fahrenheit or higher to flourish. If we have not reached this timeframe, you can transfer the plants to bigger pots and place them in a greenhouse or keep them in your sunny window until warmer conditions.

Harden off your plants by gradually putting them outside for a few hours at a time and then returning

them to their spot indoors.

Ultimately, you can put as much time and energy into your seed starting as you'd like. No matter the lengths you go, the rewards will be fruitful.

Be sure and register for the Master Gardener's "Spring Into Gardening" classes from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. March 9 at the Phoenix Charter School. Register at OSU Extension Office.

Douglas County Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who help the OSU Extension Service serve the people of Douglas County. Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu or 541-672-4461 or visit 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg.