

GARDENING

Follow these tips to grow plants from seeds

GARDEN SPOT



MARTY FIGLEY

said. That love and interest is still deep within her.

It's very easy to grow plants from seeds, according to Karen. She grows those not available from nurseries as plants or if she wants a particular color.

Although seeds can be grown on a windowsill, it isn't recommended as the windows get cold. Karen uses a heat mat and a two-bulb, regular fluorescent light. An old heating pad also works.

"There is no one exact way," Karen said. "Some seeds require no more than six to eight weeks;

others more, especially perennials. Some need light to germinate; others darkness. Some need to be scarified (nicked) with a nail file, knife, sandpaper or a jeweler's triangular file. Others may need to be soaked in water overnight."

The backs of the seed packets contain a wealth of information. But it's necessary to know the last frost date (here, around May 15-20) in order to know when to start the seeds, Karen said. The number of days to harvest means after the plants are set out in the garden.

Planting

Using a waterproof marker, label each pot with the date the seeds are planted, the common name and the botanical name.

Plant the seeds thickly in a soilless mix, equal parts peat, vermiculite and perlite — this supports the roots and lets in oxygen. It contains no nutrients.

Press the seeds that need light to germinate firmly into the growing mix with your hand. For those that need darkness, just sprinkle a bit of soil on the top or set the seeds deeper in the potting medium.

Don't let the medium dry out. Watch carefully so it isn't soaking wet — too much water reduces the amount of oxygen.

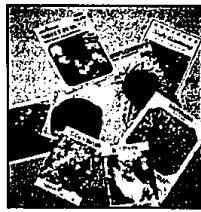
Always water from the bottom, which prevents damping off. Set pots in pans of lukewarm water and remove them after the soil surface is wet to the touch. This takes a few minutes. Then drain the excess water off before putting the pots back on the mat or under the lights.

Set the pots or seeding tray on the heat mat. The temperature needs to be 70 to 78 degrees Fahrenheit for germination. Cover the trays with a transparent lid or plastic wrap.

After germination

After germination, the first set of leaves, cotyledons (food storage organs), appear. When the second set of leaves appear (the true leaves), remove pots or trays from the heat pad and transplant the seedlings to larger pots, keeping only the best.

Use a commercial potting mix and moisten it well. When transplanting into individual pots, hold each seedling carefully by a leaf stem and plant it in a hole made with a pencil, deeper than



Packet line: Seeds, seeds, seeds! Time to start them indoors.

the depth at which it first grew. Be careful not to crowd or twist the roots.

Set the pots on a shelf and adjust the lights so they are two inches above the foliage of the plants. The lights need to be on chains so they can be adjusted as the plants grow. Fertilize once a week with a weak solution of all-purpose fertilizer.

Here are some additional tips. Karen finds that when she gently brushes the seedlings with her hand, it makes them stronger. Keep everything clean — wash pots in a 10-percent solution of bleach and water. Keep seeds in Ziplock bags in a cool place, not necessarily the refrigerator.

When it's about time to set the plants in the garden, they will need to become adjusted to their new surroundings. This is called hardening off.

Take the seedlings outdoors on a cloudy day for one to two hours. Take them in at night. Continue this for several days; leave them outdoors all night the last few days. Before planting into the garden, check (using your hand) that the soil temperature is warm.

Karen recommends The Cook's Garden (call 802 824-5526, fax 802 824-9556) and Johnny's Seeds (call 207 437-9294, fax 207 437-2165). Both are organic.

Also, Le Jardin du Gourmet (visit www.kingdon.com/ag/jdg or write P.O. Box 76, St. Johnsbury, VT 05883) offers 25-cent seed packets.

GOOD GARDEN TIPS
■ Visit the "Shake Off the Winter Blues" greenhouse sale

noon to 4 p.m. Feb. 14 at Cranbrook, 380 Lone Pine in Bloomfield Hills. Find orchids, ferns, succulents, blooming bulbs and more. Questions? Call (248) 645-3147.

■ If a plant is damaged by ice, snow or wind, don't be in a hurry to prune it. It may straighten up on its own. Prune broken limbs only.

■ Use the dishwasher to clean old pots and trays. Rinse pots first to remove salts and dirt. Scrub with baking soda if they're really caked on. Put clay pots on the bottom rack, plastic ones on top.

■ After cleaning clay pots, rub them with linseed oil.

■ Win rose bushes in the All-America Rose Selection Valentine Sweepstakes. To enter, visit www.rose.org or send a postcard to AARS Sweepstakes, 221 N. LaSalle, Chicago IL 60601. The deadline is Feb. 28, 2001.

Marty Figley is an advanced master gardener based in Birmingham. You can leave her a message by dialing (734) 953-2047 on a touch-tone phone, then 111, then 3445. Her fax number is (248) 644-1314.

GARDENING CALENDAR

Does your garden club have an upcoming event or meeting you want publicized? Send items for consideration in *Gardening Calendar* to Ken Abramczyk, Observer Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150 or e-mail kabramczyk@oe.com, or homecomm.net. To send a fax, call (734) 691-7279.

NOVI
Nancy Lindley, master gardener, will discuss winter hardy roses as

a guest of the West Rose Society of Novi at 7:30 p.m. at the Novi Civic Center, 45175 Ten Mile Road. The event is free to the public and offers a social hour.

FARMINGTON
Caroline Dana Lewis, founder of the Ann Arbor chapter of the Great Lakes Rhododendron Society, has more than 300 specimens in her yard. She will give a slide presentation and lecture at noon Monday, Feb. 5, at the

Longacre House, located on the Farmington Road between 10 Mile and 11 Mile roads. For information, call 476-3017.

LIVONIA
Flower arranging, with an emphasis on petite designs, will be discussed at the next meeting of the Livonia Garden Club at 7:30

p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 6, at St. Andrew's Church. The speaker is Gretchen Pustay, a flower show judge, who is also a member of the Hill and Dale Garden Club of Farmington Hills.

DETROIT GARDEN CENTER
The Detroit Garden Center's 15th Annual Orchid Display. Lecture

and Sale is scheduled for 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 10, and noon-4 p.m., Sunday, Feb. 11

at the Moross House, 1460 E. Jefferson, between Rivard and Ripelle, 1/2 mile from I-375.

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