

Giving Your Plants A Head Start

Get a head start on spring. Start some seeds indoors in a sunny window so the little plants will be ready to set out in the garden when mild spring weather comes.

Your green thumb will get a pre-season workout, and it is more economical than buying the little plants. Also, if you fancy something special you may not find the plants you want.

WHEN do you start the seeds? Zinnias, marigolds and other fast-growing kinds should be started six weeks before you want to put them in the garden. Start the seeds the end of March and the plants will be ready to set out mid-May.

Slower growing kinds, which include petunias, snapdragons, verbena and lobelia, should be started eight to 10 weeks before transplanting.

WHERE do you grow the seeds? A sunny window is all you need. Or they can be grown under fluorescent lights. You can make your own set-up by fastening the light tubes to the underside of a shelf. Any kind of light tube will do, but best results are obtained with special "grow lights."

What do you use for a container? A flower pot, milk carton, cottage cheese carton can be used. Make holes in the bottom for drainage. Peat pots are good and simplify transplanting because the plants are set out right in the pot. Eggshells can also be used, too, and they can be planted right along with the plants, too.

WHAT do you grow the plants in? Garden soil is OK, or compost, but it should be sterilized. Heat the pot of soil in



a 200 degree oven for 15 minutes, or put the pots of soil in a large kettle with water in the bottom and boil for a half-hour. Sphagnum moss or sand or vermiculite can be used, or a mixture of these. Vermiculite is used by the professional growers. It is sterile, light weight and readily available.

HOW do you go about it? Fill the container to within a half-inch of the top, leaving room for watering. Water thoroughly. Sprinkle the seeds on top or put a few seeds on the soil in a small container.

If a flat or large pot is used, seeds can be put in rows. If seeds are large, cover them with a bit of the growing medium. If seeds are tiny leave them uncovered. Water with a gentle spray. Cover with a piece of plastic to keep soil moist. Never let seeds dry out. Then cover with newspaper or a saucer of something to keep the light out, and put the container in a warm place. Seeds germinate best in the dark and at a temperature of 60 to 70.

Check the seeds after a couple of days and remove the cover after they begin to sprout and put them in the light.

The first leaves to appear are "seed leaves" and are part of the seed. Next come the true leaves. After the first or second set of true leaves develop, thin the plants or transplant them so they will not be overcrowded. Turn the containers to keep the plants straight. As they grow they lean toward the light.

Give them a little dilute liquid fertilizer after a couple of weeks and repeat every couple of weeks.

HARDEN the plants before they are put in the garden. Put the pots outside during the warm part of the day. Start with an hour the first day and increase the time each day.

WARNING: Don't go overboard and start too many seeds. Even one little packet can soon fill every available window sill. It's fun, but it's work to care for too many babies.

TIP: If you want to grow your own, but want to simplify the job, look for the preplanted kits. They come in many varieties.



- Decorative Panels
- Fountains

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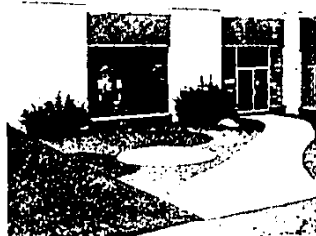
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"Landscaping" is what every new homeowner needs -- whether he knows it or not. And this goes for those who buy brand new houses set in a sea of mud, or those who buy older houses lurking in a dim tangle of trees and shrubs.

Landscaping is what you do to organize your outdoor spaces.

Trees and shrubs, hedges and beds of flowers can be arranged so your yard is a pleasant and functional outdoor living space. Plants can provide enclosure and privacy, shade and shelter, as well as the varied textures and bright colors that delight the eye. Paving can set off special areas and even the ground can be shaped and contoured so it is part of the landscaping.

Really, there is no right or wrong way to landscape. If rain water drains away from the house, if there's shade where you need it and sun where you want it, and the plants you select grow OK -- you've got good landscaping.

Give the kids a place to play, the adults a place to relax, guests a place to park their cars -- and you've got good landscaping.

Keep it simple so it isn't too much work to take care of, accent the front door so everyone knows where to enter, plant a colorful shrub or tree to enjoy from the kitchen window -- and you've got good landscaping.

The style can be modern or traditional, colonial or just plain you. It's all a matter of taste.

Then make a plan on paper. Get out in the yard and measure so you know what you have to start with. Then experiment a bit and fit your ideas into the space you have -- and there's your plan.

