

# Indoor start boosts plants

By BILL MEACHAM

In a few weeks I will be making my morning and nightly visits to the basement. That's where I have my fluorescent light "garden" and a window that gets good sunlight where I start my seedlings for the outdoor garden.

Some of my gardening friends—and nameless members of my family—think this is too much work. Why bother, they claim you can buy all the started plants you need in the spring.

But when summer comes they can see the difference. It is surprising how a few odd or unusual plants can catch the eye, especially some of the new hybrid annuals and vegetables which you can't buy as started plants in the local nursery.

I think my efforts are well worth while, and starting seeds early isn't that difficult. In fact, this can be one of the most fascinating parts of gardening. And it can be profitable since flower and vegetable plants in my neighborhood cost as much as a dollar a dozen.

There are a lot of seed-starting kits in stores, but you can start seeds in containers you may already have around the house. I have used discarded plastic cottage cheese containers—after holes have been poked in the bottom for drainage. You don't need fancy soil, either. Packaged potting soil mixed half and half with

peatmoss is excellent. Then all you need is a window with good light.

Most important when starting seeds indoors is the timing. Some seeds take a long time to germinate; others take a long time to grow large enough to be planted outside. These slow plants should be started two months ahead of outdoor planting time. These would include "annual" geraniums, petunias, begonias and asters, and, among the vegetables, tomatoes and peppers.


"Quickies" like marigolds and zinnias need only a few weeks before the seedlings are large enough to plant out. Start these three to four weeks before planting-out time. Start them too early and they will become stringy and weak because of poor light.

If you use some leftover potting soil you found around the garage, spray the surface with Raid House and Garden Bug Killer before seeding to deter any soil insects that may be around.

Sprinkle seeds on soil surface. Push large seeds like tomato and pepper into the soil. Water with a fine spray or light sprinkle and cover pot with a pane of glass or sheet of plastic. Leave cover on until seeds sprout and then remove. Give seedlings ample light when they are up and don't let the soil dry out.

With a little TLC you will have good plants to set outside when the weather becomes warm.

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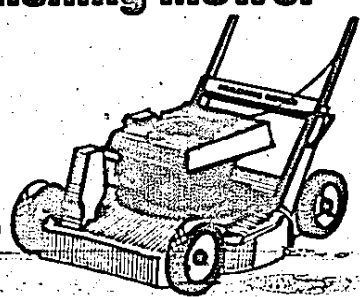
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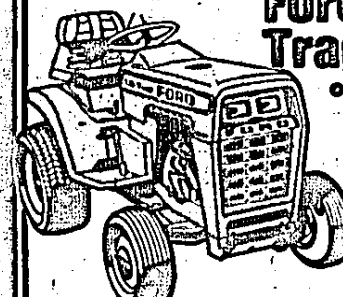


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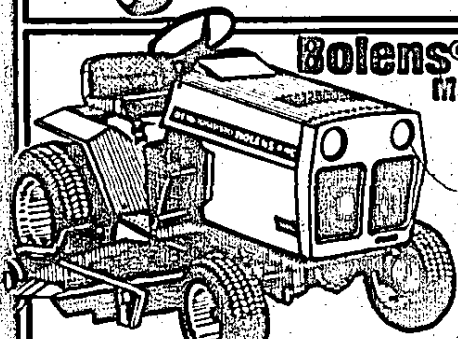
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