

# Starting seeds? Now's the time

Raising plants from seed is interesting. In our area the first week in March is the time to begin — 6-8 weeks prior to the last spring frost. Seeds store food and the embryo of a new plant. Seeds from seed companies will produce the plant you want. If you collect your own, the flower or fruit may revert back to the parent plant, be smaller and have a muddier color. Some seeds such as acorns and maple tree seeds are protected by a cover to delay sprouting until the correct "nature" time. This is why plants need a dormancy period — to let the seeds prepare for another growth.

A container for starting seeds can be anything from a coffee can, wooden box, cottage cheese container or commercial flats. There are many seed starting kits on the market. If you use a container without drainage holes, put some gravel in the bottom and cover it with a piece of paper toweling. The containers should be at least 2 1/2 to 3 inches deep and can be deeper. The shallower the container, the more water needed.

There is no set rule for preparing the potting mix. Experiment until you get a blend that you like. You might want to try equal parts of vermiculite, milled sphagnum and perlite or potting soil, a little vermiculite and some peat. There are also commercial seed starting mixes that are good.

In any case, the soil should be put to nearly the top of the container. Water and drain this one or two hours before planting. And don't plant the seeds too thick. Follow package directions. Some need

**GOOD GARDEN TIP:** If you have over-wintered potted geraniums, cut them back to six to eight inches as they will be more bushy in the coming months. Also, more flowers will result; set them in full sun, when danger of frost is past, don't over-fertilize.

to be covered with the soil and others just pressed into it.

If you use a container with drainage holes you can water from below; if not use a very fine mist, you don't want to wash the seeds into a corner. A mister is good for watering. Follow package directions as to water temperature.

Now cover the flat with plastic, making sure it does not touch the soil. Water often enough so the soil doesn't dry out. Keep the container of seeds out of direct sunlight, but in high light, filtered sun is ok. After germination (when the first little leaves begin to show), remove the cover and put in a stronger light for two to three days and then into full sun.

If the seedlings are in a window, turn the pan occasionally so they will grow straight. If you use fluorescent lights, put the flats 3-6 inches below and don't let the foliage touch the lights. The light should remain on 10-12 hours each day.

AFTER THE second set of leaves appear (the true leaves), repot the seedlings into clay or peat pots. Moisture the soil thoroughly before this and let it drain a few hours, being sure the soil is moist to the bottom of the container. You can use

down to earth  
**Marty Figley**

a packaged potting mix with a little vermiculite, peat or both. If you use a good soil mix, there is no need to fertilize now. If you use a sterile potting soil, fertilize with 1/4 solution.

Before moving the plants to the garden harden them off by putting them in a protected area outdoors, the side of the house, on a porch or a partially shaded area. They need to be exposed gradually to the outdoor weather and light conditions, which may take a week. If the weather turns chilly bring them back into the house.

If you have no room in your home to report to larger containers, thin the plants in the flat so that a space of one inch is between them and fertilize with a 1/4 solution weekly.

Handle the transplants carefully as the roots are very tender. Try using a mason's trowel. Pinch out the top growth of the stem branching plants so that they will form new side shoots.

After the seedlings are hardened off and have been in full sun for several days, transplant them into the garden. The ground is ready when you dig a spade full of soil in your hand and drop it. If it crumbles it is ready to work.

Another reminder about the Perennial Garden Design and Plant Culture symposium at Oakland University in Rochester, this Saturday. Call Eaton Nursery at 851-6440 or Ken Miller, horticultural consultant at 1-800-347-6565, for information.

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Arts Midwest, a consortium of the nine Midwest state Arts Councils, seeks applicants for its fellowship program designed for minorities in the field of art administration.

Four to six qualified individuals, (specifically African-Americans, Asians, Hispanics, and Native Americans) from Midwest communities will be selected. Fellows may be undergoing career transition, or may be practicing artists. Fellows will work in two to three different arts organizations to experience a variety of aspects of arts administration. Fellows receive an \$18,000 stipend and up to \$3,000 in travel expenses. At the completion of the year, Arts Midwest assists the fellows with job placement.

An advisory panel, consisting of outstanding arts, educational and civic leaders, will assist Arts Midwest in selecting fellowship participants and guiding the program.

The deadline for individual applications is April 30. June 1 is the deadline for organizations interested in hosting a fellow.

For application forms contact Arts Midwest at 528 Hennepin Avenue, Suite 310, Minneapolis, Minn. 55403. For information, contact Arts Midwest staff members Janis Lane-Ewart or David Frasier at (612) 341-0755.

The Minority Arts Administration Fellowship Program is funded

by two major sources:

\$300,000 from the Ford

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