

Gardener Tip Feb. 08 -Starting Transplants

Are you a fan of starting your own plants from seed? Wondering what to do with those seeds you just bought? These steps will get you started:

1. Start with a sterile or organic seed starting mix. It needs to be lightweight so the roots get air and don't rot.
2. Plant the seeds in small pots or in a seed flat. Try to space them out so it is easier to transplant them later. Water gently, then put in a warm place such as the top of your refrigerator.
3. As soon as the first seedlings begin to emerge, they need strong, bright light or they will be weak and pale. You will need fluorescent lights kept 1-2 inches above the tips of the leaves, or put the pots in an exposed south-facing window.
4. Give yourself six weeks between starting the seedlings and planting in the garden (longer for some crops, so check the back of the seed packet). Use the CCG planting calendar to calculate when to start each kind of plant.
5. Feed with a dilute organic fertilizer every week until time to set out.
6. Before planting in the garden, the plants should be set outside for 3-4 days on a protected patio or other shaded outdoor location. This 'hardening off' process allows them to withstand colder and windier weather.
7. When ready to transplant, first water the plants well. Gently remove each plant from pot/flat and immediately set into holes spaced at the correct distance apart for the mature plant. Pull soil back around roots and gently firm the soil.
8. When you are done transplanting, water the whole bed gently and thoroughly. Keep evenly moist and be careful not to uncover roots when watering.

Tip: you can create a work of art, if you transplant green and red lettuce in a pattern. Try it!

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