

March 2009

## Vegetable and Herb Gardening Tips

- After this month, spring will arrive fast, so get your seed orders in and complete your garden plans. Be prepared to keep a variety of crops growing throughout the season so that no space is wasted.
- Some gardeners like to use seeds left over from last year. Check their viability by doing your own germination test. Place 20 seeds on a moistened paper towel, roll up the towel and place it in a plastic bread bag. Put the bag on top of the refrigerator or other warm location and check after 5-7 days to see what percentage has germinated. Discard seed lots with less than 75% germination.
- Work 1-2 inches of compost into your vegetable beds as soon as the soil is workable.
- Potatoes, onion sets, onion seedlings and peas can be planted as soon as the soil can be lightly worked. Chinese cabbage, leeks, beets, kale, mustard, and turnips can also be planted now. Start sowing spinach and lettuce seed outdoors in cold frames. You can also start sowing seeds of spinach, lettuce, kale, mustard, sorrel, corn salad and other greens indoors under fluorescent tubes. These plants will be ready to transplant outdoors in 2-3 weeks and should be protected by a cold frame or floating row cover. It is still too early to start other vegetable transplants such as tomatoes and peppers.
- Consider purchasing some floating row cover material to protect crops against insects and promote early growth. Floating row covers are made from a spun-bound polyester material and are available from mail-order seed and garden supply companies.

When growing flower or vegetable transplants follow a few simple guidelines:

- Use a soilless growing medium containing peat moss, perlite and vermiculite.
- Keep the medium moist, not soaking wet. Speed up germination by providing bottom heat and keeping temperatures at 70-75 degrees F.
- Use cool white fluorescent tubes and run them 14-16 hours each day. Keep seedlings 1-2 inches from the lights.
- Pot plants up to larger pots so they don't become root-bound.
- Fertilize transplants that have to be grown for more than 6 weeks, with a weak soluble fertilizer according to label directions.

### Herbs

- Rosemary, thyme, lavender, sage, basil, and tarragon seeds can be started indoors in late March. Fresh tarragon, rosemary, and mint sprigs can be purchased in food markets and rooted indoors in a soil less mix to be grown under cool white fluorescent bulbs. The new plants can then be set outdoors in pots or garden beds in May. Now is the time to cut back last year's old perennial herb plants. This will not only look better, make room for new growth but will also help reduce insect and disease problems.
- March is also a good time to divide over-grown rhubarb plants and top dress with a balanced fertilizer or well-rotted horse or cow manure. Weeds in asparagus and rhubarb beds can be difficult to control because they are so entangled with the crop plant.. It is always best to hand-pull weeds or cut them off cleanly at the soil line with a small, sharp hoe. Be careful not to cut into crowns or emerging spears. All asparagus foliage should be cut down and composted at this time.

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