

Gardening

Preparation helps with transplanting

By Pat Leuchtman
leisure Columnist

Memorial Day weekend is the traditional date in our area for setting tender seedlings out into the garden. But you must make some preparations before transplanting day.

Transplanting is a shock for all plants because their roots are disturbed and because they must face the harsher elements of outdoor weather after being coddled in the house.

To get a headstart on the season I start a number of seeds indoors. Lettuce and cucurbits are among the easiest plants to transplant, but for different reasons. Lettuce is shallow rooted and adjusts to transplanting easily. After being hardened off in a cold frame it goes directly from the flat into the garden.

The cucurbits, like squash and pumpkins, very much dislike having their roots disturbed, so the first of May I plant these seeds directly into individual peat pots or pellets and after a very brief hardening off, (a couple of afternoons sitting on my porch) they go into the ground, still in their pots, right after Memorial Day.

Some seedlings are transplanted twice. When tomatoes, peppers and eggplants are still young and have not yet gotten their true leaves, they can be transplanted from the flat into individual peat pots (or whatever other container you would like to use, such as styrofoam or paper cups). Early in the day, water the flat thoroughly. This will make separating the tiny plants easier. I use a spoon handle to help move the seedling from the flat and into its new pot that is filled with the same soil

mixture I use in the flat. The plant is then watered carefully. It is no better to waterlog a plant than it is to let it go thirsty.

Later, when it is warm enough for the plants to go into the garden, they are hardened off and set into the soil in their peat pots. The pots must be thoroughly covered with soil, otherwise the peat pot will act as a wick, taking moisture from the soil around the roots and evaporating it. Tomatoes and peppers especially should be planted deeply because new roots will develop along the buried stem, increasing the plant's vitality.

The cole crops, broccoli, cauliflower and cabbage, don't need transplanting into peat pots as much as the tender plants, but when they start to get crowded in the flat I thin them. Instead of throwing away the thinnings, and part of my seed investment, I transplant the thinnings into peat pots using the same method mentioned above.

Plants that will be transplanted from the flat into the garden should be root pruned about a week before. That is, take a sharp knife and cut through the soil, blocking off each seedling or two. This will cut long, intertwined roots and encourage the development of fine feeder roots. Separate these blocks carefully, keeping as much of the soil intact as possible when transplanting.

The hardening off process is the same for all seedlings, whether they are to be transplanted directly from flats or the peat pots put into the prepared soil.

About two weeks before you plan to put the seedlings into the garden put them into a cold frame. Unless you run into a spell of very warm weather, keep the cold frame closed

for the first two days. On the third day open it slightly and close it at night. Each succeeding day open it a little more and don't completely close it at night unless you expect a frost. This process eases the delicate seedling's adjustment to the harsher elements of outdoor weather. At the end of the hardening off period, the weather should be warm enough, and the seedlings should be sturdy enough so that they can be safely set out into the garden.

If you don't have a cold frame, bring the flats outdoors for a longer and longer period each day and bring them in at night. In the beginning put them in a sheltered spot, on the porch or under a shady tree. Do not put them in direct sunlight at first, even if they have been used to a sunny window. Taking the tender seedlings from the house and putting them in the strong sun and drying breezes could be a fatal shock.

There are many advantages to starting your own seeds for transplant. It is cheaper, and you also have a larger choice of varieties than you are apt to get when you buy your transplants at a nursery. You can keep various plants coming along in flats well into the summer, so that whenever you have a bare spot in the garden, you will have a plant to stick in and thus increase the productivity of the garden.

Also I get itchy to work in the garden long before it is possible to put anything in the ground and starting my own flats of seeds is a gardening chore I can do in April.

Finally, there is a more complete satisfaction at harvest, knowing that you have had your hand in right from the start. □

Catalogs offer variety

By Earl Aronson
AP Newsfeatures

The 1980 garden seed catalogs have arrived, offering new and novel varieties and tried and true vegetables and flowers. Here is a sampling:

From Herbert Brothers, Brewster, N.Y. — an extensive herb list, with an "herb and ailment remedy chart" (\$7). Also cold-hardy wild flowers and broom corn, a "back-to-nature-item," plus 88 new annual and perennial flower varieties.

Burpee, Doylestown, Pa. — Flowers: Dwarf Gem calendulas in mixed colors; Dwarf Double French Marigolds Happy Yellow, Happy Orange and Happy Red; Improved hybrid marigold Golden Climax (carnation-flowered) and Bouquet hybrid zinnias in separate yellow, rose-pink, orange and scarlet colors. Vegetables: Sweet corn Candystick II, hybrid-yellow, recommended for freezing, slim cobs, extra long; squash Butter Boy hybrid, butternut type that produces well in one-third less space than Waltham butternut, 2½-2¾ pound fruit with reddish-

orange flesh, nutty-sweet; tomato Supersteak hybrid, extra large, oblate in shape, up to 2 pounds weight each, resistant to fusarium and verticillium wilt diseases, mature 80 days after plants set in garden.

Park, Greenwood, S.C. — Lettuce, loose leaf, Crispy Sweet, upright, fast growing, ready in 40 days; cantaloupe Honeydew Pineapple hybrid, smooth, round, 5 pound melons, ripen in 85 days on vines.

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