

# Home/Garden

## For the inexperienced: Starting seeds indoors

By PAM OAKES  
Cooperative Extension

Experienced gardeners have learned over the years which growing methods and which seeds and plants will give them the best vegetable garden. Of course, they'll still experiment with new varieties of tomatoes or try a new technique like floating row covers, because that's part of the fun of gardening.

If you're still at the inexperienced stage, however, it's wise to build on the success of other gardeners.

One of the questions often asked this time of year is whether to buy seeds now and start plants indoors or wait until late spring and buy transplants from the garden center. Starting seed indoors requires suitable space, the right containers and some sort of light arrangement, but the most important ingredient is commitment on the part of the gardener. It certainly is easier and probably no more expensive to buy transplants, but there's a lot of satisfaction watching your

plants grow from tiny seeds. You'll have a much wider choice of vegetables — from the newest hybrids to exotic Oriental imports. It's wise to start growing seeds on a small scale at first and count on local garden centers for proven and reliable varieties at the proper planting time.

Most vegetables need six-to-eight weeks indoors, so when we count back from Franklin County's average last frost date of May 20, we find late March or early April to be the right starting time. You need small containers 2- to 3-inches deep with drainage holes in the bottom. These should be filled to 1/2-inch from the top with moistened sterile soilless mix which is formulated to hold the correct proportion of air and water. Small seeds can be pressed lightly into the soil surface, but larger seeds should be covered to twice their thickness.

Water containers by placing them in shallow pans or flats filled with 1-inch of warm water and remove when the soil appears evenly moist. Seeds usually germinate in the

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dark and require moisture so cover with several layers of slightly damp newspaper. Place on a warm surface about 70 to 75 degrees — many people find the top of their refrigerator ideal for germinating seeds.

Check daily, watering from the bottom to keep just moist at all times; and remove the cover at the first sign of growth. If there are two seedlings to a pot, cut one off with small scissors — never pull it up as that will injure the roots of the other plant.

Now the seedlings need light, and you'll produce shorter, stockier plants under fluorescent lights that are on 14 to 16 hours a day. Start off with the lights 2 inches above the plants and gradually increase the distance to 6-to-8 inches, bringing the lights

back closer if seedlings begin to look too spindly. Keep the seedlings out of drafts, but good air circulation is essential so you may want to use a small fan pointed away from the plants. If you have large windows with a southern exposure, you can grow plants there without lights but remember to rotate the pots often and move them away from the cold windows at night. Seedlings like daytime temperatures between 70 and 75 degrees, with a 10- to 15-degree drop at night.

If seeds are sown in flats instead of individual pots, they'll need to be transplanted as soon as they're large enough to handle easily, usually the third leaf stage. Hold by a leaf not the stem as the plant can replace damaged leaves but stem injury is fatal. Begin feeding with a weak houseplant fertilizer

solution three-to-four weeks after sowing and pinch growing tips when the plant is 4- to 6-inches high.

Read your seed packet carefully — the tiny print contains much useful information. Check for the timetable for setting plants in the garden and then plan a "hardening off" week. This is just a transition time when you gradually acclimate plants to outside conditions in a place protected from sun and wind, bringing them back inside each night.

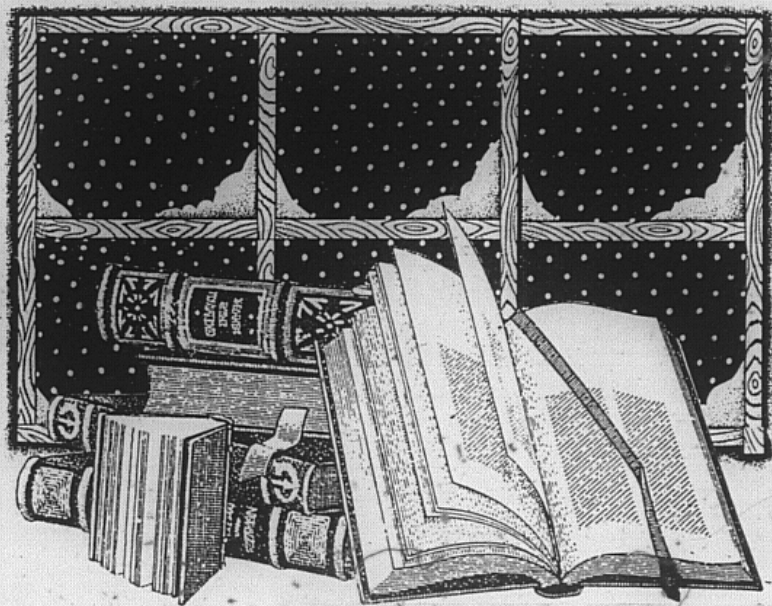
Plant outside on a calm, cloudy afternoon and be prepared to cover tender seedlings if frost is predicted.

In a few weeks you'll have vigorous plants that will produce beautiful healthy vegetables if you keep giving them the care they need. And at the end of the season you'll be one of those "experienced" gardeners!

Master Gardeners will be in the Franklin County Cooperative Extension Office during the growing season — call 774-2902 if you have gardening questions or would like a copy of "Starting Vegetables and Flowers Indoors."

## February: Gardening by reading

After you've watered the azalea, checked the other houseplants for spider mites and urged on the potted narcissus there isn't a lot for the gardener to do in February. I use this time by indulging in a little horticultural reading, reading that is very different from the hysterical forays into garden-reference books to diagnose and prescribe for the latest disaster. In February I look for a soul mate like Karel Capek who concentrates on raising front flowers on his windows in January and cultivates the weather in February.



Recorder/Pat Allen

Pat Leuchtman

Between The Rows

Capek wrote *The Gardener's Year* in 1931 (now available in a paperback edition published by the University of Wisconsin for \$7.95) and his brother Josef illustrated it with cartoon-like drawings, the perfect accompaniment to this witty book on the delights, dilemmas and torments of the gardener. Gardening is such a timeless and universal pursuit that it matters not at all that these Czech brothers gardened and wrote over fifty years ago.

February is an "addle egg among the months, ... an altogether unreliable month, excels them all with its wily tricks... God only knows why in leap years one day is added, just to that wayward, catarrhal, sly and slanted month; in leap years one day should be added to the beautiful month of May, so that there would be thirty-two, and all would be well. What have we gardener's done to deserve that?"

Capek has suffered every every gardening plight, cursing the poor design of the human body which has legs that are sometimes too long, sometimes too short and wishing for telescoping limbs like a photographic stand, despairing to find that his giant campanula which promised to be a new variety altogether, is only a horse-radish and realizing that a garden is never finished. "In that sense it is like the human world and all human undertakings."

I join the brothers Capek in their gardener's prayer, "O Lord, grant that in some way it may rain every day, say from about midnight until three in the morning, but you see, it

must be gentle and warm so that it can soak in; grant that at the same time it would not rain on campeon, alyssum, heianthemum, lavender, and the others which you in your infinite wisdom know are drought-loving plants — I will write their names on a bit of paper if you like — and grant that the sun may shine the whole day long, but not everywhere (Not, for instance, on spirea, gentian or rhododendron) and not too much; that there may be plenty of dew and little wind, enough worms, no plant-lice and snails, no mildew and that once a week thin liquid manure and guano may fall from heaven. Amen."

### Magazines

After supplicating the Lord, I also turn to the monthly magazines that pile up without necessarily getting read from gover to cover as they arrive. Horticulture. The Magazine of

American Gardening (\$20. for 1 year subscription, P.O. Box 53879, Boulder, CO 80321) is a glossy magazine that is as noted for its literary style as for its advice.

Horticulture carries articles by some of the most knowledgeable and engaging garden writers like Henry Mitchell, Towah Martin and Roger Swain. Their advice is practical and down to earth, and their experiences reassuring and encouraging. The sumptuous color photographs of gardens, small and private or large and public, inspire.

A very different magazine, but equally helpful and enjoyable is the digest-sized Organic Gardening (\$12.97 for 1 year subscription, 33 E. Minor St., Emmaus, PA 18098). Organic Gardening gives wonderful advice to the gardener on how to raise vigorous and productive vegetables as well as beautiful and healthy flowers, without the use of poisonous

chemicals. You can hardly get through one edition of the evening paper without learning of some new environmental disaster, of how someone has innocently or negligently managed to pollute air, soil or water. Although we know it's probably impossible, we like to think we can create a safe haven for our families in our yards. I have raced to my mailbox and looked to Organic Gardening for information and advice ever since I planted my first vegetable garden in 1972.

Gardeners need to keep up with new plants, new tools and new techniques. Magazines are a good way of keeping up with all the latest developments, all the ways to make our gardens more beautiful, more productive and less work.

Actually, I don't think gardens ever become less work: as soon as we find we have saved some time and effort, we spend it on making the garden still bigger.

## Kitchens get a new look

By BARBARA MAYER  
The Associated Press

A new philosophy of design may turn the American picture-book kitchen into a high-tech laboratory of new ideas for preparing food and cleaning up after meals.

So-called Eurostyle kitchens are distinguished by a sleek appearance and appliances that rely on electronics to provide greater flexibility and function and were designed to go together.

At least one version of the Eurostyle kitchen was shown at the National Association of Home Builders show in Houston recently. The kitchen by Frigidaire is pictured in the February issue of *Better Homes & Gardens*, and the appliances recently won a design award from the trade magazine, *Appliance Manufacturer*. Products include: refrigerator, freezer, wine cooler, ovens, cooktop and dishwasher.

According to New York industrial designer Morrison S. Cousins, one of the judges for the contest, advantages of the modular appliances in the Euroflair line include the fact that they can be installed flush with cabinetry, each appliance blends with all the others and performance standards are high.

The dishwasher features a choice of stainless steel or porcelain enameled interior. Ovens come with optional meat probes and atomizers to steam-inject liquids.

Cooktop choices include a ceramic glass unit with four elements and a warming area sealed within. A recessed rear coil

makes it possible to fit the refrigerator flush against the wall.

Cousins said sleeker, more sophisticated kitchen appliances are being developed by a number of American companies.

Some reasons for the new emphasis: "The media is giving a lot more attention to what things look like. A number of European companies have purchased controlling shares in American companies, and perhaps most important, European kitchen appliances have been successful with American consumers."

He said the success enjoyed here by companies such as Krups in small electric appliances has proven that many Americans are willing to pay more for sleek-looking kitchen electrics.

"In small appliances, the new, simpler, more sophisticated look is coming very fast. In major appliances where tooling costs are greater and it's more expensive to take risks, it's coming more slowly. But within a very few years, we will see substantial aesthetic improvements in American major appliances," Cousins asserted.

Christian Klingspor is responsible for international design at Electrolux, the European parent company of White Consolidated Industries Inc., of which Frigidaire is a part. He supervises seven design departments in five countries. He said it is common to buy appliances and cabinetry together in Europe. In Germany about half, and in Italy from 30-40 percent of sales of appliances and cabinetry are integrated kitchens.

## Douglas

### RUG AUCTION

MON. EVE., FEB. 8 AT 6 P.M.

This sale will consist of over 200 Contemporary, Oriental and Chinese rugs; room size, scatters, and runners. If you are looking for Oriental rugs for your home and wish to buy at auction prices, you will find this sale most interesting. (Preview: 3-6 p.m.) (10% Buyer Premium). Lic. No. 271.

AUCTIONEERS (413) 665-2877

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## Here's the

them. Paper the ceiling only if you need some special effect.

first time. How far away from the fence should the gun be held?

ter to apply two thin coats than one heavy coat. Before you get to work