

## Starting Seeds Provides Winter Gardening Activity

January may not be a good “gardening month” in many people’s minds but it can be a good time to start vegetable and flower seeds indoors. Seeding plants gives gardeners the opportunity to produce quality plants, at a lower price than buying established plants in the spring. The following steps will help get your seedlings off to a good start.

- **Quality Seed:** Start with fresh seed using varieties recommended for your area. Obtain seed from a reputable source like local garden stores or seed catalogs. If you buy from a store that doesn't specialize in plants make sure to check the package date to see if it was packaged for the current year.
- **Date to Seed:** Use your Kansas Garden Guide (available free online) to determine transplant dates. From the transplant date count backwards (weeks from seeding to transplant on the seed package) to determine your seeding date.
- **Proper Media:** Don’t use regular potting soil or garden soil to sow seeds. These can be too heavy for small seeds and garden soil may contain diseases. Garden stores sell mixes just for starting seeds. These will produce optimal germination.
- **Moisture:** Once seeds are planted the soil shouldn’t be allowed to dry. Keep soil moist (but not water logged) with a spray bottle and plastic over the container. Remove the plastic once the plant germinates but keep the soil moist until transplant.
- **Light:** Pay attention to the germination needs for each plant. Some will need to germinate in the dark, but all seedlings will need light once they emerge. Newly emerged seedling left in darkness, even briefly, will continue to stretch until they run out of energy.
- **Temperature:** Some plants require a higher temperature for germination than we typically have in our homes. You may try to find the warmest spot in your home (the top of the fridge or the top of the dryer on laundry day) or purchase a heated germination mat. Once germination occurs, most plants can be moved to cooler areas. Pay close attention to soil moisture in high heat areas.
- **Touch:** Don’t just sing to your plants; touch them! Gently brushing your hands over your plants will make them stronger. “Brush” them with 20 strokes a day to get stockier plants. Keep in mind that not even touch will make up for inadequate light or overcrowding.
- **Hardening Off:** Before you transplant your seedlings outside, make sure you harden them off. This means you begin gradually exposing the seedlings to outside conditions. Begin setting your seedlings outside about two weeks before transplant. The first day only leave them out for an hour or two, but as the days pass gradually increase their time outside. This will minimize deaths from the harsher outdoor conditions.

For suitable plant varieties for Kansas, visit the following link. <http://hnr.k-state.edu/extension/info-center/recommended-plants/>