

Cross Pollination



Getting a jump on spring by starting seeds indoors

By Justin Godard

Starting seeds indoors is a great way to get a start on the growing season. Vegetables, annuals and perennials can all be started indoors. The best time to start your seeds is 6 to 8 weeks before the last frost. You can start them even earlier however, remember to be practical about the space you'll need for the seeds you're growing.

Start by gathering growing containers and a good quality seed starting mix. You can re-purpose yogurt and other plastic food containers, or you can purchase commercial cell packs. Ensure the containers have good drainage and a tray or bottom for catching the draining water.

Sowing the Seeds

Fill your containers with soil, gently taping the soil down and re-filling, leaving half an inch at the top for additional soil and water. Place the seeds on top, and sprinkle additional soil to cover the seed based on the information provided on the package. Gently water, a spray bottle works well, to ensure the seed remains covered in soil. Cover the container with a lid and place in a warm location. I place mine on a stool over a vent or heater in the house. Warming mats and lights could also be used. The soil for most plants will need to reach 80 F degrees to germinate. Ensure the soil remains moist,

watering gently every one to two days. Germination can take up to 14 days. Once the seedlings have risen from the soil, place near a bright window, ideally the sunniest location in the house. Grow lights or lamps should be secured around 2 inches above the seedlings and should be left on for 12 to 16 hours. Remove the cover during this time and keep off as long as the house and temperature around the seeds remains 70 to 80 F degrees.



slow release fertilizer or natural liquid fertilizer at half strength. Keep the plants moist and near a sunny window. As the weather warms harden the plants off by placing them in a sheltered location outside during the day. For the first few days place them in a semi-shaded location and then move them into full sun. Once the night time temperature stays above 50 degrees begin keeping them outside at night. The plants can now be planted in their permanent pots for the summer or into the ground.

Tips

I prefer to avoid lights as I find it erodes the cost-savings associated with seed starting. I place the seedlings beside a bright window and move them to ensure direct sunlight and the brightest location.

To prevent mold and mildew on the seed soil I remove the cover a couple times during the day.

For some late fruiting vegetables such as tomatoes, peppers or eggplant, it can be useful to start seeds even earlier. I start these vegetable seeds in early February. By the time I plant them outside they're usually a foot tall, which provides me with my first crop of tomatoes around mid-June.

It can be very tempting to start every annual and vegetable plant you plan on growing, but in most cases this is not practical. Start the seeds that represent the best cost savings or have a particularly long growing season.

Potting and Planting Outside

Once the seeds are a few inches tall and have a couple sets of true leaves (not the cotyledon or first set of leaves), gently remove and pot the plants into a slightly larger container. Use a high quality potting mixture. Feed the plants by mixing in a small amount of compost, or use a

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Newsletter of the Halton
Master Gardeners

Website:

<http://haltonmastergardeners.wordpress.com>

March

TO DO List

- ◇ Repot houseplants in preparation for new growth
- ◇ Order summer flowering bulbs
- ◇ Force branches of spring flowering shrubs
- ◇ Keep bird feeders clean and topped up
- ◇ Get mower serviced
- ◇ Visit a maple sap producer – the first sign of spring!
- ◇ Attend Canada Blooms
- ◇ Attend local Seedy Saturday or Sunday

Master Gardeners of Halton

Email Help Line: haltonmastergardeners@gmail.com



Where to Find Master Gardeners for Advice

We will be available at Canada Blooms at the Direct Energy Centre in Toronto, from March 13 to March 22, 2015

Halton Master Gardeners Speakers List

Join us for our monthly speakers held at the Royal Botanical Gardens at 7:15 p.m., first Wednesday of the month.

Contact: Patty King at a_p@cogeco.ca Please note a \$5.00 fee covers speakers and refreshments.

The Wonderful Herb Parsley

By the Garden Goddess, aka Christine Says

Keep parsley close to where you prepare food not in the fridge, otherwise if you are anything like me you will open the crisper and there is it lying green and slimy because you have forgotten all about it. I now keep mine near the stove, it can't get any closer unless it jumps unheeded into the pot.

Here is what your parsley herb provides:

Vitamins A, C, and K.

A source of flavonoids and antioxidants (especially luteolin) and folic acid.

Culinary Uses and Delights:

Italian:

Salsa Verde - a mixture of parsley, capers, anchovies, garlic and vinegar soaked bread.

Gremolata – parsley, garlic and lemon zest used for Osso-bucco ala milanese a kind of veal stew (The Italians are the Western World's original good cooks, not the French, at least according to an Italian friend of mine!)

English:

A parsley roux sauce served over fish or gammon (ham). Don't say yuck until you've tried it.

Lebanese:

Tabbouleh salad (yummy) mostly parsley.



Read on for interesting facts:

Parsley is native to the Mediterranean central region and prefers moist soil and well drained.

Germination is slow 4 to 6 weeks. A biennial, (which is a pain) the first year will result in a rosette of leaves.

Wildlife:

Swallowtail butterflies use parsley as its host for their larvae. The caterpillars are black and green striped with yellow dots. Within two weeks they become butterflies.

Birds and nectar feeding insects feed on the flowers and birds eat the seeds.

Types of Parsley:

Flat leaved parsley is more tolerant of rain and sun, is easier to cultivate and has a stronger flavour.

The curly leaved parsley is used mostly for garnish, I eat mine even in the restaurant.

Parsley, by any other name....

Last but not least the word Parsley is from the Old English word *petersilie*, similar in contemporary German and *peresil* in French, which is derived from the medieval Latin *petrosilium*. Maybe this is more than you ever wanted to know. However, do enjoy your parsley and use plenty of it, it's good for you.