

## ***Starting Seeds Indoors***

If you are considering raising your own vegetable plants for Spring from seed, February is the best time to get started. We generally like to allow about 6 weeks from the time the seeds are sown until they are ready as transplants outside. If you really want to be successful then there are a few tips you should follow:

First of all, let's start with the basic factor that determines plant growth and its success...that is light. You will need a good source of artificial light when starting young seedlings inside the house regardless of how many windows you have. Start with a shop light fixture or some type of fluorescent fixture and use a good grow-light bulb that provides light in the red/blue spectrum range. These bulbs are generally found in garden centers and should be allowed to burn for at least 12 hours per day over top of the young seedlings during and after germination. Keep the light close to the trays, within one foot is best the insure optimum results.

The second important factor would be a heating mat under the seed trays to keep the soil temperatures warm, enhancing germination. This mat should be made of vinyl and designed for the purpose in order to be safe against moisture. Never use a conventional heating pad for this function, Provide a good seed starting mix to insure even germination and cover trays with a plastic humidity dome to conserve moisture. Try to select seeds that are similar in size to fit into the same trays so that germination occurs on or about the same time. Try to keep moisture uniform by misting and not over-watering.

After germination occurs, remove the humidity dome but keep your light source close to the trays, generally less than 12 inches above. This will keep your seedlings nice and sturdy. After the seedlings have developed two full sets of true leaves, it is safe to transplant them into cell packs or small pots.

After transplanting, be cautious of over-watering and still keep the light source close at hand. One week after transplanting, a mild fertilizer with a liquid feed is good. Once the plants have reached a height of about 6 inches and danger of frost has passed, it is safe to set the young plants outside. If temperatures remain cold and transplanting is delayed, run the plants on the dryer side to conserve growth.

Following these few tips will get you started into a great gardening season. Spring is almost here, enjoy the garden!

*Mark*