KPOV — *The Point*

Gardening: Get Good At It

“Starting Seeds”

February 12, 2019

Central Oregon’s short growing season, daily temperature swings, variable weather conditions and lack of frost-free days determine which seeds will grow here successfully. When selecting seeds, check the maturity date listed on the seed packet. The average growing season in Central Oregon lasts 80 to 90 days. To compensate for the temperature swings between hot days and cold nights, add 14 days to the number of days given for maturation on the seed packet and choose seeds that mature within about 65 days.

Starting seeds indoors is a great way to extend our short outdoor growing season. To ensure success your seeds will need: adequate light, a seed starting mix rather than soil and a shallow seed flat 2 or 3 inches deep. Planting seeds in small, individual containers or large flats with individual cells will keep roots separate and allow for more successful transplants.

Set your flat on a solid tray and fill each cell with moistened medium. Firm the medium with your fingers. The seed packet will tell you how deep to plant the seeds. Use the eraser end of a pencil to make indentations of the correct depth. Lightly cover the seeds with growing medium. A spray bottle can be used to finely mist the cells or water can be added to the tray and allowed to move upward through the mix.

Cover the tray with clear plastic to retain moisture and heat. Most seeds prefer indirect light and require temperatures between 70 and 80 degrees to germinate. Placing an electric heating mat under the seed tray will provide consistent heat and allow seeds to germinate faster and produce healthier roots.

When the seeds sprout, remove the plastic covering. Seedlings need 12 to 16 hours of light daily and some dark period each night to develop properly. Natural light can be supplemented with grow lights or two “cool white” 40 watt fluorescent tubes. Hang lights that can be easily raised and kept 2 to 4” above seedlings as they grow.

Seedlings draw energy for germination from nutrients stored within the seed and don’t need fertilizer. Once several true leaves develop, seedlings can be transplanted to larger individual containers of soil or put outside in the garden during the first to second week in June. All seedlings started indoors should be hardened off before planting outdoors. Move them outdoors to a somewhat protected area for increasing periods of time each day over a period of 7 to 10 days. Bring them indoors at night if a freeze is in the forecast.

Transplant on a cloudy day or after the sun has reached its peak. Row cover can help plants get off to a healthy start by protecting them from cold and wind. Even hardened off plants may wilt when first exposed to full sun, but they should recover within a day or so.

If you decide to plant seeds directly outdoors in your garden, the same guidelines apply. Use a soil thermometer to determine the optimum soil temperature to ensure germination. Irrigate the soil the day before planting. Use the recommended planting depth and spacing on the back of the seed packet. Lightly irrigate after planting and be sure to label the rows and record the seed varieties and locations in a garden journal.

Each year Central Oregon Certified Master Gardeners teach Seed Starting classes. You can find information about these classes and answers to your gardening questions by visiting our website: [www.gocomga.com](http://www.gocomga.com/) and click on the KPOV tab on the orange bar.

This has been Gardening: Get Good At It on KPOV — The Point.

**Websites:**

<http://extension.oregonstate.edu/deschutes/vegetables-0>

<http://www.extension.umn.edu/garden/yard-garden/flowers/starting-seeds-indoors/>

<http://www.ext.colostate.edu/ptlk/1034.html>

**Publications**:

<https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/em9128>

<http://extension.oregonstate.edu/deschutes/sites/default/files/seed_starting_schedule_0.pdf>

<http://extension.oregonstate.edu/deschutes/sites/default/files/veggardcalendar.pdf>

<http://cru.cahe.wsu.edu/CEPublications/pnw0170/pnw0170.pdf>