

START YOUR SPRING GARDEN INDOORS

While skiers and winter outdoor enthusiasts may feel a sense of sadness as winter draws to an end, the thought of spring flowers brings joy to the hearts of most gardeners.

Even though there may still be snow on the ground, it's not too early to begin planning your garden and even planting it – indoors. Indoor planting is especially beneficial for those of us living in northern climates where the growing season is significantly reduced. Here are a few tips courtesy of the Ontario Real Estate Association and your local REALTOR® to get your garden growing early.

A head start

Planting an indoor garden of seedlings is a relatively easy, fun and rewarding project. All you need are seeds and three basic things – soil, water and light to give your garden a head start this spring. Petunias, lobelia, marigolds, snapdragons and coleus are some of the most popular flowers to seed indoors in March. Other warm weather flowers can be started indoors in April.

Purchase seeds at your local garden center and plant them according to the package directions for germination time, planting depth, spacing and transplanting information. Sow the seeds in a good quality “soil-less” soil or starting mix that has been sterilized. Using soil from your garden is not advised since there is a possibility of introducing insects or disease to the seeds and the seedling plants. Seeds can be planted in a flat, tray, pot, egg carton or peat pot as long as it has proper drainage. Be sure to thoroughly clean the containers before use.

Seeds started indoors have the same basic requirements as outdoor seedlings – soil, water and light. However, indoor seedlings need a little more attention to artificially maintain an ideal growing environment. Once the seeds have been planted at the proper depth, moisten the soil with a light spray and keep them continually moist until they have germinated. Once germination takes place, simply water the plants as needed.

Lighting

Seedlings need a lot of light to grow properly. When seedlings receive insufficient light they become tall and spindly or “leggy.” Even if you have a window that receives full sun, you might need to supplement it with artificial light. Because it would be all but impossible to recreate the intensity of direct sunlight, you'll need much longer growing days to compensate. Use bulbs that are specifically made for growing plants and place them just a foot or so above your seedlings. You'll want to keep these lights on at least 14 hours a day. Fluorescent tubes are ideal because they won't produce as much heat which can quickly dry out your seedlings.

Watch your garden grow

Wherever you decide to set up your indoor garden be sure it has good air circulation and the temperature ranges between 18C to 21C (65 to 70 degrees). Although you may be anxious, it's important not to start seeds indoors too early. If they outgrow your flats or small pots you might try thinning them and transplanting the largest to bigger pots, but for the most part you want to plant them outside just as they become large enough to survive transplanting. This is generally four to six weeks after sowing, when they have at least two sets of true leaves. If you're aiming to plant towards the end of May, you probably shouldn't be starting seeds any earlier than late March.

Consult the experts

Having the proper information and equipment will ensure your indoor garden's success. Check with your local garden center or a good gardening book for more tips and happy gardening!

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