



HOME & GARDEN

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Vegetables and Herbs Tips - January 2009

Culture

- One wonderful advantage of home food gardening in Maryland is producing healthy leafy greens. Attentive gardeners in warmer sections of the state grow and harvest salad greens through the fall and winter months using row covers, cold frames, and unheated greenhouses (high tunnels). There is, however, one serious potential problem that must be addressed: nitrate accumulation in all leafy greens under low-light conditions of late fall, winter, and early spring. Many types of plants take up excess nitrates to help keep cell walls from collapsing due to decreasing sugar levels brought on by reduced photosynthesis. Nitrate levels are highest at sunrise so always harvest salad greens on sunny days in the afternoon. Eating greens high in nitrates can inhibit the ability of your blood to carry oxygen. Nitrates are also converted to nitrites in our bodies that can produce carcinogenic compounds. So, grow lots of leafy greens for as long as possible- just do it safely.
- Plan for spring seeding now, it's a good time to check the germination rate of old, questionable seed. Place 20 seeds between moistened paper towels, roll up the towel and place it in a plastic bag. Put the bag on top of the refrigerator or other warm location and check after 5-7 days to see what percentage has germinated. Discard seed lots with less than 75% germination.

Herbs

- Dried herbs should be stored in a cool, dark location away from heat sources. Herb plants inside the house should be kept in full, direct sunlight or given 14 hours of fluorescent lighting each day. Keep plants away from drafts and heat sources.

Have a pest or gardening question?
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