



HOME & GARDEN

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February 2009

Vegetable and Herb Tips

- Consider last year's garden successes and failures, and map out your revised garden plan for this year. To maximize your garden's yield do succession planting. That means that a new crop should be seeded or transplanted in an area vacated by a crop that is overly mature, has stopped producing, or is badly damaged. Order your garden seeds now so that you will be ready to sow seeds at the proper time.
- Consider purchasing some floating row cover material to protect crops against insects and promote early growth. A floating row cover is a light weight spun fabric that permits light and water to enter, traps the soils natural heat and keeps out many pest insects.
- Did your tomato, eggplant and pepper plants flop over last year? Construct or purchase strong supports for these plants with wire fencing, wood or metal stakes.
- In late February, you can start sowing seeds of early season greens such as spinach, lettuce, kale, mustard, sorrel, corn salad and other greens indoors under fluorescent tubes. These plants tolerate cool soil temperatures and will be ready to transplant outdoors in 4-5 weeks but should be protected by a cold frame or floating row cover until warmer weather arrives. Or you could direct seed these crops in loose, fertile garden soil cover with a cold frame or under a floating row cover. Start the seeds of long-season chile peppers indoors under lights at this time. Herbs such as rosemary, thyme, and lavender seeds can also be started indoors in late February.
- When growing flower, vegetable or herb transplants follow a few simple guidelines:
- Use a soilless growing medium containing peat moss, perlite or vermiculite.
- Keep the medium moist, but never soaking wet. Speed up germination by providing bottom heat and keeping temperatures at 70-75 degrees F. Use cool white fluorescent tubes and leave them on for 14-16 hours each day. Keep seedlings 1-2 inches from the lights. Pot plants up to larger pots so they don't become root-bound. Fertilize transplants that have to be grown for more than 6 weeks, with a weak soluble fertilizer according to label directions.
- It's a good time to check the germination rate of old, questionable seed. Place 20 seeds on a moistened paper towel, 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% (15 out of 20 seeds) germination.

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- Fresh tarragon, rosemary, and mint sprigs can be purchased in food markets and rooted indoors in a “soil-less” potting mix to be grown under cool white fluorescent bulbs. The new plants can then be set outdoors in pots or garden beds in May.
- Occasionally, rosemary over-wintered indoors may develop a white coating, a sign of the powdery mildew fungus. The disease usually disappears after plants are moved back outside. Plants can also be sprayed with “ultra-fine horticultural oil” to control this disease. Follow the label waiting period and thoroughly wash what you pick before eating it.

Have a pest or gardening question?
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