

Planting crops indoors lets you get started early

It's easier to find exactly what plants you want

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PLANT, WATER, GROW AND HOE. These seem to be the steps to a successful garden. In northern Nevada starting transplants from seed before the last frost date of May 15 is an excellent way to get the jump on the gardening season

When you start plants from seeds, you get transplants of the exact varieties you desire, rather than having your selection limited by what is available in a store.

A rule of thumb is to sow seeds indoors six weeks prior to planting outdoors. Supposedly you can start your seeds on March 6 for a May 15 planting date. But anyone who has lived here awhile knows it could snow May 15, so there is flexibility to when you plant outside with later being better than earlier.

Growing seeds require a planting medium which may be vermiculite, soilless mixes or a variety of soil mixes. Germinating media should be fine, aerated and loose. It must be free of disease, insects and weed

seeds. It should hold some water, but not keep delicate seedling roots too wet. An often recommended mixture is one-third sterilized soil, one-third sand, vermiculite or perlite and one-third peat moss. Small amounts of soil mix can be sterilized in the oven according to University of Arizona Cooperative Extension. They recommend putting the slightly damp mix in a heat-resistant container in an oven at about 250 degrees F. Use a meat or candy thermometer to make sure the soil gets to 180 degrees F for at least 30 minutes. Do not overheat. They point out this mixture in the oven could smell pretty foul, so maybe just purchasing a sterilized mix from the nursery is a better idea.

The containers and tools you

use to plant with should also be sterilized. Wash them to remove debris, then rinse in a solution of one part chlorine bleach to 10 parts water. You can purchase special trays, make your own or use recycled household containers. Be sure they drain well.

Read the seed packet label for directions. It will tell you if seeds need to be pre-germinated or other special treatments. For most seeds, fill the container to within $\frac{3}{4}$ inch of the top with moist growing medium. Firm the medium for a flat surface. Seeds are planted at a depth twice their diameter. Most should be lightly covered with soil. Don't plant too deeply or the seed will not germinate.

Try new varieties; explore the vegetable world and have fun!



About this series

This article is the fifth in a University of Nevada Cooperative Extension series on starting your own vegetable garden. Articles explore such topics as site selection, ordering seeds and preparing your soil. To find the complete series of articles, go to our "Grow Your Own" page at www.unce.unr.edu



UNCE video extra

We have more information and a video on starting seeds indoors at "[Paper Pots: Seeding and Recycling](#)" online at www.unce.unr.edu.



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