

Transplants

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Gardeners in Wyoming can get a head start on the season by the use of vegetable transplants. Too many make the mistake of starting transplants in the house too early, producing plants, which are soft, tall and spindly. These will suffer a setback when set out in the garden in early spring.

So what is the best time to start transplants? The middle of March until the middle of April is early enough for most vegetables started in flats or containers in the house, greenhouse or cold frame. The goal is to grow stocky, sturdy plants that will stand up under cool, windy conditions.

Cabbage, broccoli and cauliflower - the cool weather plants - can be germinated five to six weeks before transplanting outside in late April or early May. They can stand some light frosts, but may have to be sheltered for a few days from raw winds to be well established.

Peppers and eggplants should be started six weeks prior to setting out by early June. Tomatoes, on the other hand, require no more than four weeks growth before setting out in early June. Three weeks is usually sufficient time for melons and cucumbers. These plants resent being transplanted, and are best grown in peat pots to avoid any root disturbance. Plant pot and all and let the roots grow out through the sides after you have gently split them. The big advantage in starting melons in pots is that you often save two or three weeks germination time over seeds planted in cold soil. Bottom temperatures under the pots should range from 70 to 75 degrees, or even 80, to insure rapid germination. Thereafter the heat can be turned down.

Unless you start, cantaloupe or muskmelon inside, you may not enjoy ripe luscious melons before the first frosts in early September. Some extra early varieties might make it, but not usually with the growing season listed in seed catalogs. Also if you provide some kind of shelter these transplants can be set out at least two to three weeks earlier since they will be protected from a light frost and the soil temperature will be higher.

In addition, if you do not want to start plants from seed you can always buy an assortment of plants at the local greenhouses, garden centers and supermarkets. Often these shipped-in plants arrive too early for transplanting outside and suffer from the winds at displays outside the stores. If you buy some of these plants, keep them inside as transplants that way you will have saved some time starting from seed, and have the plants you want. Moreover, if the weather conditions are not ideal when you are ready to plant use protective covers like plastic milk jugs with the bottoms cut out.

One big advantage of growing your own transplants is that you can get large plants of the variety you prefer, especially if the local nursery does not carry them. When the weather starts to warm up some of the cool season vegetables like lettuce, spinach, carrots can be planted in the garden for an early jump. If you plant these cool season vegetables early a second crop could be planted later in the spring for a double crop and then again in September if you are so inclined. Carrots for example can be dug up with several inches of snow on them so long as the ground does not freeze solid.

If you are going to use a cold frame type system outside to protect the transplants the period mentioned above can be moved up by two to four weeks.

For those wanting to try a Farmers Market this year, remember to plant a little or extra, there is more demand than supply. Also, consider growing a little extra for the soup kitchen or the homeless shelter.

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