VEGETABLES

Tips for Gardeners New to Growing Transplants

Following are several tips that can help home gardeners in growing transplants.

*Use fluorescent lamps, not incandescent bulbs. Often a south-facing window does not provide enough light to grow strong transplants and therefore supplemental lighting is helpful. Fluorescent lights produce much less heat than incandescent bulbs. This allows fluorescent bulbs to be placed very close to the plants (2 to 4 inches) increasing the amount of light received. Additional light produces stronger plants.

*Leave fluorescent lamps on long enough. Young plants do not react to day length, so lights can be left on as long as desired. Sixteen hours of light each day usually is sufficient. A timer can be used to automate the process.

*Rewet a peat-based media with hot water. Though moist peat will absorb cold water easily, dry peat will not. Hot water overcomes the hydrophobic nature of dry peat. Small batches of media can be mixed with water in a sealable plastic bag to cut down on the mess.

*Plants react to movement. Brushing your hand over the tops of the plants each morning and afternoon will cause them to become stockier. Use about 10 strokes each time. Strokes will not compensate for lack of light. Plants grown under inadequate light will be spindly regardless of care. (Ward Upham)
**Lettuce**

Though lettuce is most often planted directly from seed in late March to early April, it can be started from transplants. Transplants allow lettuce to mature earlier so that it escapes the excessive heat that can lead to a strong flavor and bitterness. Seed should be started four to five weeks before transplanting. Because transplants are placed at the same time as direct seeding, now would be a good time to begin. Use a seed starting mix and plant shallow as lettuce requires light for germination. A soil temperature of 70 degrees will encourage germination. However, a cooler temperature of 55 to 60 degrees should be used once the plants emerge.

Time to maturity varies depending on the type of lettuce, with leaf lettuce being the quickest, followed by bibb, romaine, and buttercrunch lettuce. Head or crisphead lettuce is the slowest and is least likely to mature before becoming bitter.

Spacing also varies with type. Leaf lettuce plants are spaced 4 to 6 inches apart, buttercrunch, bibb, and romaine are set at 6 to 8 inches and head lettuce should be at least 8 inches apart in the row. Lettuce does not have an extensive root system and requires regular watering if rainfall is lacking.

Fertilize before planting according to soil test. Plants should also be sidedressed when about 1/3 grown. Sidedressing is done with fertilizers that have more nitrogen than phosphorus and potassium. Use 1/3 cup of nitrate of soda (16-0-0) or 1/4 cup of a 27-3-3, 29-5-4 or similar fertilizer per 10 feet of row. The latter fertilizers are lawn fertilizers but will work well for side-dressing as long as they do not contain weed killers or weed preventers. (Ward Upham)

**FRUIT**

**What Fruit Trees to Plant?**

If you’re pondering that question, here are some comments on fruit trees commonly grown in Kansas. Fruit trees are a long-term investment requiring careful thought before purchase. Begin by choosing fruit you will eat, not fruit that appears attractive in the catalog. Other considerations are outlined below. Space doesn’t allow for a complete list in this newsletter. For more choices, go to the publication “Small- and Tree-Fruit Cultivars” at http://www.hfrr.ksu.edu/DesktopModules/ViewDocument.aspx?DocumentID=2814

You may also request this publication from your local K-State Research and Extension office.
Apples: Though we can grow a wide variety of apples in Kansas, pest-free fruit requires an extensive spray program. Apples are normally sprayed from March (dormant spray) until about two weeks before harvest. Sprays from April on throughout the growing season are applied at least every two weeks. You need two different varieties of apples to produce fruit. Recommended varieties include Jonathan, Gala, Empire, Delicious, Golden Delicious, Jonagold, and Granny Smith. Recommended apples that are disease resistant include William's Pride, Enterprise, Priscilla, and Redfree. Planting disease-resistant apples will reduce, but not eliminate, the need for pesticide applications. None of the apple varieties listed above are resistant to the summer apple diseases sooty blotch and flyspeck. It may be necessary to periodically apply a fungicide in the summer to suppress these fruit blemishing diseases. Also, all of the varieties listed will require protection from codling moth and other insect pests.

Cherries: Sweet cherries (such as Bing) are not well adapted to Kansas, but sour (pie) cherries are. Cherries are borne in June, so relatively few sprays are needed. Only one tree is needed for fruit on sour cherries. Recommended sour cherries are Montmorency, Meteor, and North Star. The latter two are genetic dwarfs with Meteor reaching 10 to 14 feet and North Star growing to 8 to 10 feet.

Apricots: Apricot trees are quite ornamental, which is fortunate because late spring frosts usually eliminate fruit. On average, assume you will get fruit about once every 5 to 10 years. Portions of western Kansas may see fruit only once every 30 years. It is best to have two varieties for full production. Recommended varieties include Moorpark, Goldcot, Manchu, and Superb.

Peaches: Usually a relatively short-lived tree (10 to 12 years) that needs a great deal of pruning to keep productive. Peaches have the same problem with late frosts that apricots do but may not be quite as bad. Only one tree is needed for fruit. Try Intrepid, Early Redhaven, Redhaven, Harken, and Reliance. Intrepid blooms later than other peaches and blooms are much more frost resistant.

Pears: Pears are tough and are often one of the few trees that survive on an old homestead. Though trees should be sprayed, the chance of getting good fruit without spraying is much better than it is with apples. Usually, two trees are needed to get fruit. Proven pears include Seckel, Moonglow, and Duchess.

To learn how to control fruit pests see, “Fruit Pest Control for Home Gardens,” at http://www.ksre.ksu.edu/library/hort2/e592.pdf or available from local K-State Research and Extension offices. (WU)

FLOWERS

Iris Leaf Spot Control Starts Now

Now is a good time to begin control measures for iris leaf spot by removing old, dead leaves. Iris leaf spot is a fungus disease that attacks the leaves and occasionally the flower stalks and buds of iris. Infection
is favored by wet periods during the spring, and emerging leaves eventually show small (1/8- to 1/4-inch diameter) spots. The borders of these spots are reddish, and surrounding tissue first appears water-soaked, and then yellows. Spots enlarge after flowering and may coalesce. The disease tends to be worse in wet weather and may kill individual leaves. Though the disease will not kill the plant directly, repeated attacks can reduce plant vigor so that the iris may die from other stresses. Spores are passed to nearby plants by wind or splashing water.

Because this disease overwinters in old leaves, removal and destruction of dead leaves will help with control. For plants that had little infection the previous year, this may be all that is needed. Plants that were heavily infected last year should be sprayed with chlorothalonil (Bravado Fungicide, Fertilome Liquid Fungicide, Ortho Garden Disease Control, GardenTech Fungicide Disease Control, Bonide Fungonil, Bravo Flowable Fungicide, Gordon's Multipurpose Fungicide) or myclobutanil (Immunox, Immunox Plus) starting when leaves appear in the spring. Repeat sprays every seven to 10 days for four to six sprays. Iris leaves are waxy, so be sure to include a spreader-sticker in your spray to ensure good coverage. (Ward Upham)

MISCELLANEOUS

Repotting Houseplants

As outdoor plants break dormancy and start to grow in response to the longer days and warmer spring temperatures, house-plants usually put on a spurt of growth as well. Eventually, these indoor plants out-grow their containers and need to be repotted. To check if your plants are becoming root bound and need a larger pot, inspect the root system. First, knock the plant out of its pot. Watering several hours before this operation will allow the plant to be removed more easily. On pots that are 8 inches in diameter or less, place one hand over the top of the pot with the stem of the plant passing between two fingers, and turn the plant upside down. Then rap the edge of the pot against a table. The root ball should come away from the pot. On pots that are more than 8 inches in diameter, a bit more encouragement may be needed. Place the pot on its side and rap the top edge of the pot with a rubber mallet. Turn the plant a few degrees, and repeat the procedure until the root ball releases.

Once the plant is free, take a look at the root ball. If you see a clear network of roots, the plant needs to be moved to a larger pot. If the original pot is less than 10 inches, move up an inch in size; if 10 inches or larger, increase the size 2 inches. If the pot has one or several large holes in the bottom for drainage, cover the holes with pot shards (pieces of a broken clay pot) or gravel so that the potting mix is not washed out during watering.

It is essential that the plant sit at the same level it was in the old pot. Add enough potting mix to the bottom of the pot to ensure this. This mix will need to be firmed before the plant is placed on top of it so it doesn't settle over time. After the plant is placed, fill in around the original root ball
with potting soil. Again, firm this soil with a slender stick, or tap the bottom of the pot on the table. If this firming is not done, new soil will be so light and airy that water will tend to move through it rather than through the whole root ball.

Water the plant thoroughly after repotting, but be especially careful not to overwater for about two weeks. The new soil tends to stay wet until roots penetrate. Overwatering can lead to rot. Most plants need to be repotted annually though vigorous growers may need to move up sooner.

Slow-growing plants may stay in the same pot for more than a year. (Ward Upham)

**An Easy Way to Propagate House Plants**

![Image of propagation setup](image)

Houseplant growers don’t need a lot of equipment to propagate a houseplant. Gardeners can get by with a coffee cup, potting soil, 3 drinking straws, a plastic bag and a rubber band.

Start by making a slit or hole in the bottom of the coffee cup so that it drains excess water. Then fill the cup with moist potting soil.

**Prepare the Cutting**
- Remove about a 4 inch or smaller piece from the tip of the plant. The cut should be made just below a node. A node is where a leaf attaches to the stem.

- Remove the leaf or leaves from the bottom node. This is where roots will form.

- If there are just a few leaves on the tip, fine. However, if there is a cluster of leaves, remove most of them below the tip. This will cut down on water loss as the plant makes new roots.

**Plant the Cutting**
- Push the bottom end of the cutting into the soil. The remaining leaves should not contact the soil. A rooting hormone may be used if desired but usually is unnecessary with houseplants.

**Make a Greenhouse**
- Place 3 straws equidistant from each other near the outside edge the cup full of potting soil. They will support the plastic bag so that it does not contact the leaves and cause them to rot.

- Place the plastic bag over the cup like a tent and use the rubber band to secure the open end of the bag to the sides of the cup.

**Grow the Cutting**
- Place the cutting in bright, indirect light. Do not place in full sunlight as the cutting may overheat.
- Keep the cutting warm. A temperature of 72 degrees is ideal.

Roots should form in about 10 days. Check by removing the plastic bag and pulling gently on the cutting. If it doesn’t pull out easily, roots have started to form and the plastic bag can be left off. (Ward Upham)

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