



Digging It!

May, 2014

Easy Peasy Seed Starting

Starting plants from seeds is one of the most satisfying things to do as a gardener. I am always happily surprised when they start to pop through the soil and with a little care, within two months they can be planted outside. Plants really want and need to survive, at least long enough to set seed for the future and the cycle starts again. How to get started and this is the fun part:

First, pour through seed catalogues and order seeds to your heart's content; or go to your local nursery and buy them from the racks. Seed catalogues always have a better selection and you can really get carried away and find that the whole enterprise is too daunting after all. So start small with some of the easier seeds that don't require any special attention like being frozen for a week or need to germinate in total darkness, etc.

Check the directions on the back of the seed pack before you start as all seed packets tell you when and how to plant, height and spread of the plant and other useful information. I start the majority of the seeds in mid March.



For the first step, all you need is a tray available at any nursery. These trays come with a clear plastic cover. Fill with plant starting soil (check your nursery). I divide the tray into 5 sections using a piece of wood as a divider or even cardboard. I then plant one type of seed in each section. Use old plastic plant markers (the back side) to write down the plant name and the date started. Give plenty of water and keep warm. I start mine in the kitchen. At this point they don't need a lot of light, but warmth is important. Within 5-10 days the seeds will sprout. Then move them to a sunnier area, window sills work great. Keep them moist and when they have two leaves, I get ready to start transplanting.



Fill four cell packs with soil, 12 per tray, for a total of 48 plants per tray. Water these well and let sit for an hour or so before planting. Using the tip of a pencil, I gently take the seedlings out, separate them and put one in each four pack using the eraser part of the pencil to gently push them down. Extra soil can be added at this point. Some of the roots are quite long, so if you wait too long, there will be no room for them in a cell pack.

After I have planted all the seedlings, give them water and then water again with some transplanting fertilizer. At this

point, sun and warmth is essential. If you have sunny south facing windows or a sun room, this is ideal for the seedlings. To keep them warm, use the see through plastic covers as the day temperatures are still cool and the nights are even cooler. Check every day to make sure they are thriving and that they have not dried out. As they start to grow, the covers can be left off for a few hours during a sunny day. Don't forget to turn the trays so they grow up straight.



After about 6 weeks, some plants need their tips pinched to make them bushier and to prevent them from blooming too soon. At this stage, they are tall enough that covers are no longer necessary but watering is becoming more important.

Near the end of May, move all trays closer to a cold frame, or an uninsulated mud room for hardening off for a week and then outside, in a sheltered spot for a week or so before planting. By this time many of the annuals will have some flowers and that is what it is all about. Vegetables are important too especially at harvest time when all your hard labour gives you a satisfying dinner that you can be proud of!

*Charlotte Voorstermans,
Master Gardener*

May TO DO List

- Begin to harden off houseplants before taking them outside
- Work compost into the ground removing weeds as you go, prepare for planting next month
- Dethatch lawn if more than 2cm (3/4") deep
- Move perennials that didn't have enough space last winter.
- Prune all late summer-flowering shrubs and old perennial growth.
- Divide perennials that bloom in mid-summer.
- Avoid walking on your lawn and garden as the ground starts to thaw. The soil is saturated with moisture and will compact very easily.
- Have a gardening question or need to identify a plant or pest, ask a Master Gardener (contact information to the right).

Tip of the Month:

Notable new products shown at Canada Blooms include "Water Dots" excellent for retaining water in containers. The best part is that they are reusable. They will be available soon in major gardening stores.

Also, a local Barrie Company, Wild Birds Unlimited is selling a Squirrel-proof feeder which closes its portals when the weight of a squirrel lands on the feeding station. Hint...it is not that easy to assemble; I unabashedly drove back to the store and asked for help.

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Newsletter of the Simcoe County Ask a Master Gardener books containing answers to your most common gardening questions are available at any of these speaking engagements for only \$10 or Gardening Guides for only \$1. Valuable references for you or as gifts for a gardening friend!

Master Gardeners

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Editor Cherin Harris-Tuck



Master Gardeners of Simcoe County

Where to find us for free gardening advice!

May 14/14

Barrie Library,
Joan Nieman-Agapas: Fronds and Friends

May 20/14

Simcoe County Master Gardener Meeting,
White Pine Board Room, Midhurst, 7:00 pm,
Frank Kershaw is speaking.

June 18/14

Painswick Library 48 Dean St.,
Greg Kalic: TBA

May and June Q & A Sessions

Saturdays 11 - 2

Canadian Tire Garden Centre, Collingwood

Saturdays & Sundays

Botanix, Alliston

"Let all thy joys be as the month of May"

Francis Quarles

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For information on Master Gardeners or arranging a lecture for your group please contact Tracy Bosley at 705-435-2608 or email her at tvbosley@rogers.com.