



The Real Dirt!

March, 2012

Lots of Plants for Little Money

It is easy to get started growing seeds under lights. The rewards will be huge. Not only will you have lots of plants at a fraction of what it would cost at a garden centre, you will have plenty of extras to swap with your neighbours.

You will need a 48" double fluorescent light fixture with a reflector, a 24 hour timer that you can plug in, a 4 ft. watt light bulb and a 4 ft. cool white bulb all of which you can find at a local hardware store and a flat surface to place your growing trays.

I use two types of growing mediums, soilless mixture for starting the seeds then triple mix or potting soil when transplanting. I store the mixtures separately in old enamel crispers. When filling your planting trays, fit this across the bin and use it like a little table. Any excess mixture falls back into the crisper for easy cleanup.

This is my preparation checklist;

I get a calendar and mark the number of weeks back from May 24th to Jan 1st.

- Mark on the back of seed packets, the date when I should plant the seeds

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Newsletter of the Master Gardeners of Simcoe County

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and special preparations (I keep these in a recipe card holder for 4 x 6 cards)

- 10% chlorine solution to all cell packs, pots and trays overnight

Once I am ready to plant I half fill a clean crisper with soilless mixture. Add enough warm water so that it is moist and falls apart easily. If you are using Jiffy 7's soak them well before using. Place the seed in a small depression using a pencil or thin dowel and cover the seed with 3-4 times its diameter. Place in a planting tray and cover with a plastic dome until there is germination then prop up the cover to reduce the humidity or remove altogether. Do not allow the Jiffy 7's to dry out otherwise the peat inside the pellet will dry out and harden thereby reducing its ability to soak up moisture when needed.

I like to use Styrofoam cups for starting seeds. Fill the cup, compact the soil gently, seed, cover and water lightly. The light reflects off the sides so that growth is very even. Germination takes place in as little as 24 hours. By the time you are ready for transplanting, the roots are growing out of the bottom!

Once the plants develop their first true set of leaves you are ready to transplant. Prepare a number of cell packs or pots first by filling them with moistened potting soil from your second crisper. If you have a number of plants in a small container, remove them and gently take a single plant holding it by its

cotyledon leaf and at the same time make a hole in the cell (or cup) using a pencil. Insert the seedling very carefully into the hole and add some soil as needed. Water carefully. Place the cell packs or pots in a planting tray and keep a plastic dome over it for a few days to encourage good root development.



Fertilize once a week with half strength 10-52-10 fertilizer. If your timing is right the plants will be ready for the garden of the 24th of May. All your plants should be hardened off by placing them out in the sunlight for a short period of time each day until they are accustomed to being exposed to full sunlight. If you don't do this they may wilt and die in the process. If you follow these directions you should have few problems with diseases. Most are caused by too much moisture and not enough ventilation. Some fungal diseases can be cleared up by quickly spraying a weak solution of 10% chlorine and warm water and by allowing the plants to dry out. Experience the satisfaction and of watching your seeds grow and take pride in knowing that you have created your own garden from scratch. You may want to keep a garden journal making notes of your successes and new ideas for next year.

John Crow, Master Gardener



Master Gardeners of Simcoe County

March To Do List

- Avoid walking on your lawn and garden as the ground starts to thaw. The soil is saturated with moisture and will compact very easily.
- Remove winter protection from trees and shrubs on an overcast, calm day.
- Start a few cool weather vegetables such as salad greens and onion sets in a sunny sheltered flower bed.
- Start hot weather crops such as tomatoes, peppers and eggplants under light to give them a heads-start before being transferred to the vegetable garden after the last risk of frost.
- Plan for a succession of plantings. For instance, plant beans every two weeks to stagger the harvest.
- Consider using floating row covers over cabbages, carrots and onions. If pests are unable to get to the crop to lay their eggs maggots will not be a problem later on. Securely weight down the

Where to find us for free gardening advice!

Thurs. March 15, 2011

Orillia (Shrubs; Pruning and Winter Care, Dahlias; Darlings of the Garden, Non-Stop Colour in Your Garden)

Tues. March 20, 2012

Master Gardener Meeting, The White Pine Boardroom 2284 Nursery Rd. Midhurst 7:00pm – 9:00pm

Wed. March 21, 2012

Creemore Horticultural Society – St. Luke's Anglican Hall, 22 Caroline St. West, Creemore 7:30 - 9:00 (Roses- Easier than you think)

Wed. March 28, 2012

Elmvale , (Clematis- Up, Up & Away, Non-stop colour in your garden),

Wed. April 17, 2012

Master Gardener Meeting, The White Pine Boardroom 2284 Nursery Rd. Midhurst Guest Speaker Cindy Mitchell; Hosta Fever(7:00pm – 9:00pm)

Wed April 24, 2012

Brentwood ; (Dahlias –Darlings of the Garden)

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!

Tip of the Month:

“Grandma’s Favorite” until she discovered free-flowering, disease-resistant hybrids.



For information on arranging a lecture for your group please contact Joan Nieman-Agapas 705-721-9088 or email her at jnabarrie@yahoo.ca. For more information on Master Gardeners, visit our website: www.mgoi.ca