

Raising Transplants

One of the joys of gardening includes raising vegetable transplants from seed to later be planted in the garden. It takes extra work but allows gardeners flexibility on what varieties are used.

To successfully grow indoors, some requirements must be met. A primary one is a place where irrigation water can be contained to avoid damaging things such as carpet or, better yet, a place where damage will not occur such as a cement floor.

A location with sufficient lighting is additionally imperative. Usually, if a greenhouse or similar is not available, a quality light source must be provided. An inexpensive option includes cool-white florescent light. Cool-white bulbs should be mounted within six inches of the tops of seedlings. Inexpensive fixtures often referred to as shop lights can be purchased for ten to fifteen dollars each and suspended from chains so that they can be adjusted as plants grow. A simple frame can be constructed from PVC pipe or lumber for the purpose of suspending the lights.

Finally, before planting, find a warmer area to grow seedlings. Most vegetable seeds germinate and grow optimally when kept at temperatures between 70 and 85 degrees F. If a warm enough area is not found, waterproof electric heat mats are available that will warm seed trays placed on top of them.

Once these needs are met, the next step is obtaining seeds, potting soil and growing containers. All are available from local retailers or via mail order and through the internet. If you are unfamiliar but interested in a particular seed variety, read the description carefully and cross reference it with other sources to determine if it will fit your needs.

Two different types of soil are used for growing seeds and transplants indoors. The first is commonly referred to as germination mix. Its texture is finer than most potting soils, and has it has a greater water holding capacity that is good for germinating seeds. The second type is standard potting soil that newly germinated starts are transplanted into. Many local retailers additionally carry inexpensive trays, pony-packs and other materials for starting seeds. Many of these materials can be reused for several years.

The proper time to start seeds indoors depends on when transplants should be planted outside. Additionally, the number of weeks various crops require to grow indoors before they should be planted in the garden must be considered. Broccoli can be planted outside in Cache Valley as early as April without additional protection. However, six to seven weeks are required for seedlings to sufficiently mature before being transplanted outside. Taking these two factors into consideration, an ideal time to seed it indoors would be early to mid February. Similarly, tomatoes should be grown in flats for six to seven weeks. However, tomatoes are not planted outdoors locally until late May or early June. So a good time to start tomatoes would be early to mid April.

Raising transplants can be fun but requires some practice. For detailed information about starting seeds indoors, refer to the following factsheet: <http://www.hort.purdue.edu/ext/ho-14.pdf>. Good luck and happy gardening.