

It may be hard to believe it now with all the cold and snowy weather we have been having lately, but the gardening season is only a couple months away and now is the time to start thinking about seeding transplants for your garden. If you start your own seeds, you will have much greater variety of vegetables, flowers, and herbs to choose from than if you just go down to the local garden center to pick up six-packs of nursery-raised starts. From old fashioned sweet peas to tomatoes to tasty basil, seed starting opens a world of plants to explore and enjoy right at home. You will be able to give your starts special personal care, and time your plantings so the seedlings will be ready to go into the ground at just the right time for your area.

Before planting seeds for garden transplants, make sure of a constant source of light, controlled heat (bottom is best) source, and the ability to control watering. The light source is most important, and can be easily met with cool and warm white fluorescent lamps or “grow lamps.” Seedlings develop best under a 12-hour lighting regime, with night temperatures 10 degrees cooler than the day – between 65 and 75 degrees Fahrenheit for daytime.

Most seed packets and seed catalogs provide good information on germinating seeds and growing them into transplants. Some, like petunias, require light and should not be covered while others, like Calendula, require darkness and should be covered enough to exclude light. The seeds can be germinated in any clean container, but the soil should be well-drained, pasteurized material, from a commercial source, not back-yard garden soil.

The most common mistake that many make is starting their seeds too early which results in spindly, weak seedlings from too much heat and not enough light. Back up from the last expected killing frost date anywhere from four to 10 weeks to arrive at the date of seeding. For example, petunias need 10 to 12 weeks to develop after germination and should be seeded around the end of February or first part of March, whereas basil should be seeded only three weeks before the last expected frost date. For more information, contact the Extension office at 701-524-2253 or [alicia.harstad@ndsu.edu](mailto:alicia.harstad@ndsu.edu). NDSU is an equal opportunity institution.