

Starting Seeds Indoors
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Many of us follow a time honored tradition of starting plants indoors during the winter months. This allows us to get a head start on the next growing season for vegetables like tomatoes, peppers, melons, and even cucumbers and annual flowers like petunia, seed geranium, and most other bedding plants. The question asked of me occasionally is when to start them.

Seed geraniums should be started now to have flowers by mid May. Four inch pots of geraniums require 13 – 15 weeks of growing prior to planting outdoors. You should wait to start other plants. For instance petunias require 10 – 12 weeks, but you can probably get away with eight weeks of growing indoors. Of course each type of petunia is different. Grandiflora type needs a couple of weeks extra to get ready for planting outdoors. Vegetables like tomatoes need 6 – 8 weeks to be ready for the garden. Peppers have a similar requirement at 7 – 9 weeks. When planning for starting seeds take a look at the seed package as it will usually indicate how soon to start them as well as germination requirements including; temperature, light, and seed treatments needed like stratification and scarification.

The requirements on the seed packages are just a guide and other information may be available. For instance I use the *Ball Culture Guide, the Encyclopedia of Seed Germination* for information about starting seeds. This book is like the bible of seed starting and production for bedding plant operations. It lays out information nicely about germination temperatures, time needed to flowering, time needed to get a marketable plant of different sizes (six-pack, four inch pot, etc), pinching requirements, growth regulators needed, and even garden size, spacing, and light requirements after transplanting. The wonderful thing is I have a copy and you can call with individual questions about any bedding plant, vegetable, perennial, herb, or ornamental grass that you might want to start for this summer.

When starting seeds always use a sterile soil mix and apply bottom heat. Heat will increase germination and vigor of the seedlings. Keep the soil mix moist but not waterlogged. Apply fertilizer after the seedlings have produced the first set of true leaves. Thin or transplant your seedlings into larger containers for optimal growth. Starting your own seeds indoors can be very rewarding and help with any cabin fever you may be experiencing.

If you have further interest in plant propagation I will be holding a two day course in several locations throughout western South Dakota. The locations of the course and dates are: White River, February 16th and 23rd; Spearfish, March 16th and 23rd; Pierre, March 21st and 28th; Rapid City, March 19th and 26th; Mobridge, April 1st and 2nd. During the course participants can expect to learn about seed propagation, asexual propagation, grafting, and other techniques used to propagation plants.

More information on horticultural topics can be found by visiting us online 24 hours a day on the Pennington County Extension web site at www.co.pennington.sd.us/extension/extsvc.html, or by calling me at 605-394-2188 or if you do e-mail, you can send your questions to ricky.abrahamson@sdstate.edu.