

Portland Health/Education

Start vegetable transplants indoors now

CONTRIBUTED STORY FOR THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Start flexing your green thumbs if you likely to grow your own veggies and flowers from seed this year. Gardeners who grow their own plants from seeds have a much wider choice of varieties.

Some of the earliest plants to go out into the garden are members of the cabbage family, including broccoli, brussels sprouts, cabbage and cauliflower. They grow to transplant size in four to six weeks. Seeds started in mid-March should be ready for the garden by May 1, said Ross Penhallegon, horticulture agent for the Oregon State University Extension Service.

Tomato, pepper and eggplant require six to eight weeks from seeding to transplanting. To transplant them in mid-May, start the seeds indoors the last half of March.

Cantaloupe, watermelon and pumpkins develop transplants in about four weeks. Start melons and pumpkins from seed planted into individual containers in early April for transplanting in May. Or wait and plant melon and pumpkin seeds directly into the garden when the soil is warm enough. Melons and pumpkins do not withstand transplanting as well as other vegetables and the harvest time is virtually the same with direct seeding.

Plant seeds for transplants in a homemade mix containing equal parts of sand, loam and peat moss, or purchase commercial potting or rooting mediums that are soil-less and sterile such as mixtures of perlite, vermiculite and organic materials. The mix needs to be well drained. If your seeds are saved from previous years, test them for germination before you do all the work of planting.

Place seeds in a damp paper towel and put them in a warm place, such as on top of your water heater. If less than half the seeds germinate after a few days, you might consider buying fresher seeds.

Fill the desired container with a lightly moistened soil mix. A four-inch flower pot may be seeded with 18 to 20 seeds. Cover the seeds with one-quarter inch of soil. Then label the pot and place it in a plastic bag. Tie the bag so moisture does not escape. No further watering is needed until the seedlings appear.

Keep the germinating seeds at room temperature (68-75 degrees). As soon as plants emerge, remove the bag and expose the plants to maximum light.

Cabbage germinates in a couple of days. Tomatoes may take four to six days and peppers 10 to 14 days.

After germination, keep seedling pots at lower temperatures (55 degrees at night, 65-70 degrees during the day). Unless the soil mix was fertilized previously, weekly applications of a soluble plant food are recommended.

When seedlings get their first true leaf, it's time to separate them. Carefully loosen the soil around the roots with a dull knife blade. Place each plant in a three-inch pot, or space six to eight plants in a larger plastic or pressed paper container.

Uniform watering and fertilizing and at least 12 hours of sunlight daily will produce a stocky transplant with good production potential. About 10 days before transplanting to the garden, expose the plants to cooler temperatures and slightly less water. Leave the starts out all night the week before transplanting. Avoid frosty periods.

"If you've done everything right, the final product is a stocky transplant six to eight inches high with a healthy dark green color," said Penhallegon.

Three days before transplanting, water well with a complete soluble fertilizer. When setting transplants in the garden, use plenty of water around the roots to be sure they have good contact with the soil.

Annual food drive in schools gains importance as hunger grows

CONTRIBUTED STORY FOR THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Project Second Wind, March 6-19, 2000 expected to raise more than 100,000 pounds of food

Portland emergency food agencies are reporting increases of 10 to 50 percent in the number of people they serve, and some have had to cut back

on the amount of food in food boxes to make sure they can feed all who ask.

More working families, women and children are seeking aid, say agency staff.

These pantries receive a large portion of the food they distribute from Oregon Food Bank; a central clearinghouse, which distributes

donated food to agencies throughout the state.

Project Second Wind, held in all Portland Public Schools March 6-10 and in Washington County schools February 28-March 10, will help restock the food bank's stores of healthy non-perishable foods for distribution to Portland agencies.

"For 29 years, we've counted on

Project Second Wind to provide the first major wave of community support each year," says Oregon Food Bank Executive Director Rachel Bristol

"The event is particularly important right now, as high demand prevented most food pantries from keeping a hold-over supply of food from holiday drives. They are running on

empty." Oregon Food Bank's Most Wanted Foods include canned meats and meals like chicken, tuna soups, stews and chili; boxed rice and pasta meals; canned fruits and vegetables; powered milk; peanut butter; and pasta, rice and beans of all kinds.

It is asked that no glass, perishable, or home processed foods be sent to them.

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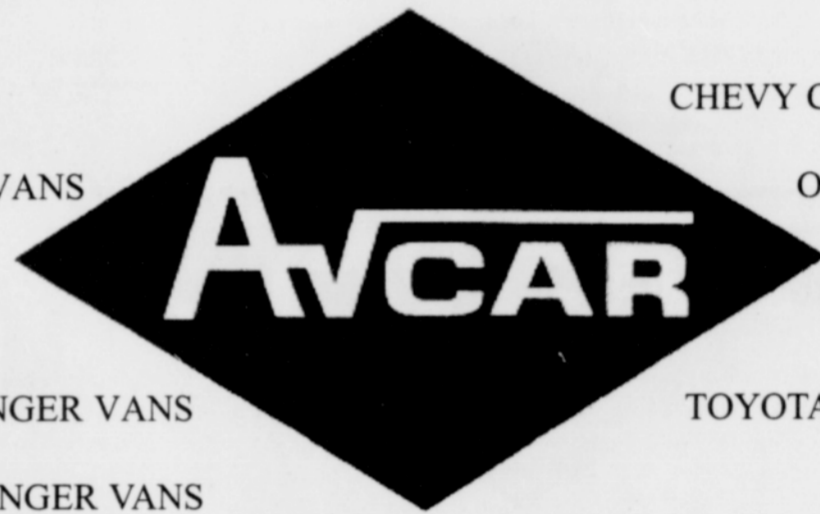
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