

Start Your Garden Indoors

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While you sit inside this month watching winter rain and snow fall, you could be starting your veggie garden indoors. With careful planning and good care, growing your own veggie starts in February and March will give you a head start on the season and allow enough time for long-season heat crops to mature. You can also grow more unique and heirloom varieties that aren't always grown commercially.

Consider These Ideas:

- Location. Find a sunny window sill or table. Many plant starts will need to be transitioned to a bigger pot at least once before they are ready to move to your garden – plan for extra space.
- Make sure to use a sterile potting soil mix.
- Use seed flats and six pack pots or make pots out of recycled materials. Make sure they have drainage holes!
- Let there be light. During winter, even the sunniest window might not provide adequate light for healthy starts. When sprouts look tall and spindly, it is a good indicator that they aren't getting enough light. Supplemental lights can be purchased at local garden centers.
- Heat and water. Most seeds prefer slightly warmer temperatures during germination than the plant needs to grow. Providing bottom heat through heating mats or proximity to a heating vent can help warm the soil. Make sure to keep your starts well watered.
- Ensure adequate air circulation to avoid fungal diseases that can cause damping-off disease.
- Plant no more than a couple seeds per cell.
- Label the flats with variety and start date.

In March and April, as soon as the soil begins to warm, many plants can be directly sown in the garden. To germinate, seeds need the correct soil temperature, enough moisture and the right light exposure. When soil is at least 40 degrees Fahrenheit, early season crops will germinate; use a soil thermometer to be precise. Jumpstart your spring planting with cloches or hoop houses to help warm the soil.

Starting seeds at home will lift your spirits and have you looking forward to spring in the garden. To learn more about seed starting, sign up for our seed starting class held in February. Be sure to consult the "Maritime Northwest Garden Guide" for year round planting information.

Seattle Tilth inspires and educates people to grow food organically, conserve natural resources and support local food systems in order to cultivate a healthy urban environment and community.

For more information, visit seattletilth.org.