

Starting Onion Plants Indoors

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. One thing that most gardeners don't do is to grow onions from seed. I think part of the reason is that somewhere along the line they tried just planting seed in the garden when you would normally plant onion sets or plants and then they failed miserably. The problem is that onion seeds need warm soils to germinate but grow best when growing conditions are a bit cooler. So what you need to do is to start your own onion plants indoors and then transplant them out to the garden in late March and early April. One advantage to starting your own onion plants from seed is that you can get some of the named varieties that may be tough to get otherwise. Cost? Well cost is all over the board and can range from less than two cents per seed clear up to 33 cents per seed for things like Texas Super Sweet. It's going to take 6 to 8 weeks to grow your own transplants to the size that they need to be for successful transplanting so starting now is necessary. Plant the seed 1/2 to 3/4 inch deep in a pot or flat filled with a soil less seed starting mix. Place this in a warm location, 75 to 80 degrees until the young seedlings emerge and then move to a cooler location, preferably in the mid 60s. Use fluorescent lights right on top of the seedlings to keep them from growing too tall. Start fertilizing when the seedlings are 2 to 3 inches tall. Once the seedlings are 4 to 5 inches tall start trimming the ends of the leaves to develop stockier transplants. Start hardening off the plants in early March by moving them outdoors, but bring them back in if it gets cold and plant in late March. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Buy Quality Garden Seed

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I talk all the time, every single fall, about buying quality grass seed for your lawn. I talk about what to buy and what to avoid. But do I ever talk about garden seed in the spring? No, not really. Part of the reason is that vegetable gardeners do pay more attention to the seed that they are buying than most homeowners do about the grass seed that they are planting. Gardeners don't just buy a packet of sweet corn seed, they buy a specific variety of sweet corn seed. Grass seed buyers often buy a brand name with no real idea of what's in the seed mix. Most of us have a favorite variety of tomato or green bean or sweet corn or cucumber. Fortunately, most of the vegetable seed that we buy locally is reputable, but it doesn't hurt to always take a look. Vegetable seed packets are stamped with information. They need to say, "packed for 2018" or something like that. They will tell you either by weight or by count, about how many seeds are in the packet. There's also a lot of good information on the packet about depth of planting, spacing between rows and in row spacing. Some smaller seeded varieties we often overplant and then thin to recommended spacings - something that's hard for gardeners to actually DO by the way. Now here's the thing to keep in mind. Some of the stores, larger stores especially, will often have vegetable cultivars that aren't well adapted to our area. To help you select vegetable cultivars that are recommended I'd encourage you to look on line or pick up here at the Extension Office the just updated bulletin, Recommended Vegetable Varieties. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Using Old Garden Seed

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I talked about this last fall, but nobody really cleans out old garden seed in the fall - they wait until spring. So maybe now, to help combat spring fever, would be a good time to do some seed cleanup and pitching. My first instinct would be to take any old seed that you find and throw it out - even seed from last year that you didn't use, throw it out. Especially consider tossing out ANY seed leftover that's in the carrot family which would include carrots, parsnips and parsley. They are notoriously short lived in storage. A lot of seed, as long as it wasn't in the heat of the garage, will last about 3 years. So if the package says "Packed for 2014" or older, just pitch it - don't even keep it around. Most garden seed is not that expensive. I've played around with old garden seed and have never been pleased with the outcome. Many times larger seeded vegetables will last longer than smaller seeded especially fluffy seeds. If you look in the packet and you have less than 20 seeds, just get rid of them. If you've got a lot of some seed stock, and want to know if it's good you can do a test germination now. Moisten a paper towel with warm water and lay it on the counter. Place ten seeds on the paper towel and cover with a second moistened paper towel. Carefully roll the paper towels and seed up and place inside a plastic bag with enough air holes for air exchange but not excessive air exchange so that it dries out too quickly. Place this in a warm spot like on top of a refrigerator. Check daily and re-moisten if need be. Check weekly for evidence of germination.

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Starting Flower bedding plants from seed

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Some gardeners will start vegetable plants from seed but very few will start flowers from seed. The same principles apply for flowers as for vegetables but be aware that many flower varieties have tiny little seed so it can be challenging. I started petunias from seed - once. I was successful, but my goodness that was a lot of work. Flower varieties likely have an even wider range of time requirements for germination. Most vegetable varieties go from germination to plantable in four to eight weeks. Flower cultivars are more likely to take 8 to 12 weeks or longer, to go from planted to being big enough to transplant. Temperature requirements are usually pretty manageable at 65 to 70 degrees. But because of the slower germination and period of plant growth a great deal of attention needs to be given to keeping the seed moist, but not soggy to the point of mold developing. I also can not over emphasize the importance of having bright lights right down on top of the small plants. A light frame can actually be constructed fairly easily and will hold a couple of 4 foot double fluorescent light fixtures. These need to be on adjustable chains so that they can be slowly raised as the plants grow. I can provide that information if you'd like. Many of the flowers that we might start from seed are also rather sensitive to cold so planting date becomes crucial which means you need to figure out when you can transplant them and then back up from there to see when you'd start the seed. Take begonias - they can take 12 weeks, you'd need to plant those in just a few weeks. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Cold Weather Impact on plants

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Okay, we're finally having a winter like we need to have. I'm not a big fan of cold weather either, but that's exactly what we need to have in winter. Up and down temperatures may be a pain, but that's the kind of conditions that will kill off more insects than just getting cold and staying cold. Remember, weather like this is what keeps us from having to deal with things like fire ants and kudzu! We were below zero around New Year's and got back down to near that cold last weekend. The first round of cold weather in late December pretty well put plants into deep dormancy. Any damage we've had to date was done by that round of cold weather. The most recent round likely didn't do any further damage. We have gotten a little more precipitation and that's a good thing. Any moisture we get this winter is a good thing, including, sad to say, that which falls as ice. As long as that ice isn't excessive, we need the moisture. Yes, we will see some damage to landscape plants. Mainly though, it's going to be damage to plants that are living on the edge. Plants like crape myrtle are marginally adapted to northern Kansas. The cold won't kill them, but it may freeze them to the ground. Once they start growing in the spring you'll know how far back you need to prune them. It may be at ground level but let's wait and see. Roses will have more winterkill than normal, again just wait and see. Any of the broadleaf evergreens may have some burn back. That includes holly, which is normally pretty hardy and boxwood. But don't be in a hurry, there's a lot of winter left! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.