

## MARCH: Planning and Starting Seedlings & Microgreens!

Last month, we talked about planning your Spring (early) garden – we hope you at least made a list of some of the produce you would like to grow! This month, we share some information about planning and starting seedlings – the cute little plants that you grow indoors to transplant into your outdoor garden. Tips, how-to's, and considerations are provided below. This month we also share insights about microgreens – these super-nutritious greens can be grown (in a short time, 3-7 days!) and harvested indoors, any time of year!

### Planning and starting your seedlings!

One of the oldest and sagest sources on gardening is the old stand-by – The Farmer's Almanac! In earlier Commit to Health materials, we've mentioned The Almanac, and provided links for checking gardening times and the like. They also are a reliable source on how to be successful in planting (and transplanting) seedlings! Some tips before getting started are worth repeating:



- **Focus on your seeds, and plant what you want to grow!** Go to local planting centers and see what seeds are suitable for your area, compare options and prices. Focus on what you really want to grow; check out growing guides such as those found here: <http://bit.ly/FAgrowingguide>.
- **Prepare for some losses.** It is always the case that some of your seeds won't germinate, or they will just don't make it to transplanting in the garden. Plant a few extra (and plant more than one see in each container!), just in case.
- **Team up with a neighbor** and share seeds and seedlings if you have leftovers!
- **Don't start your seeds too early, especially tomatoes.** Most vegetables should be sown indoors about 6 weeks before the last frost in your area. Check out the time to plant in your area: <http://bit.ly/plantseedsdate>.
- **You may have to soak, scratch, or chill seeds before planting,** as directed on packet.
- **Use clean containers.** Use seedling flats, peat pots, or other growing containers. Also consider using egg carton compartments for your seedlings, recycle! Be sure to poke holes in the sides near the bottom of the containers to allow excess water to drain.
- **Label your containers now!** There's nothing more frustrating than forgetting what you planted.



Adapted from: <https://www.almanac.com/content/starting-seeds-indoors>

**Microgreens!** Do you know what they are? Microgreens essentially are the 'toddlers' of the plant world – they are germinated seeds, that have developed tiny roots and at least their first true leaves. They are super nutritious, quick to grow (3-7 days) and great on salads and sandwiches! Here are some photos of microgreens, and instructions for growing them indoors is on the next page!



# MARCH: Starting and Planting Seedlings & Fast-growing Microgreens!



## HOW TO START YOUR SEEDS:

- Using a potting mix made for seedlings (Don't use regular potting soil, it is too heavy), pour soilless mix into a large bucket, and moisten with warm water. Then fill your containers to just below the rim.
- Plant your seeds according to your seed packet. Most seeds can simply be gently pressed into the mixture (you can use the eraser end of a pencil to push in seeds). When planting seeds, plant the largest seeds in the package to get the best germination rate. Plant at least 2 of each kind in each space in case one does not germinate.
- Cover containers with plastic. Prick holes with a toothpick for ventilation. Water as directed (don't overwater!). A pitcher may let the water out too forcefully, try using a meat-basting syringe, which will dispense the water effectively without causing too much soil/seed disruption. Fertilize with a vegetable fertilizer according to directions.
- Find a place in your house/building where there is natural bottom heat—on top of the refrigerator, for example. Seeds sprout best at temperatures of 65 to 75°F (18 to 24°C). Keep the seeds there till they sprout.
- When seedlings appear, remove the plastic and move containers into bright light.
- When the seedlings get their second pair of leaves, prepare individual pots filled with a potting mix with plenty of compost/organic matter/nutrients. Move the seedlings carefully to the new pots and water well. Keep pots out of direct sun for a few days, then put them back in the light.

## MOVING SEEDLINGS OUTSIDE – *This is when a lot of seedlings die so pay attention!*

Before transplanting seedlings to your garden, you'll first need to do something called "hardening off" to prepare the seedlings for the harsh realities (i.e., climate) of the outside world!

1. During their last week indoors (about 14 to 17 days before transplanting), withhold fertilizer and add water less often.
2. Seven to 10 days before transplanting, set the seedlings outdoors in partial shade, protected from winds, for a few hours each day. Gradually increase their exposure to full sun and windy conditions - *This is the hardening-off period.*
3. During this hardening-off period, keep the soil moist at all times. Dry air and spring breezes can dry out your seedlings, so watch them daily! If possible, transplant in the garden on overcast days, or in the early morning, when the sun won't be too harsh. Review planting tips at: <http://bit.ly/CHGtips>.



Adapted from: <https://www.almanac.com/content/starting-seeds-indoors>

## How to grow your own indoor microgreens!

- Select a shallow plastic container with drainage holes (such as a prepackaged-salad box). Fill the container with 1½ to 2 inches of moistened lightweight potting soil. Cut a piece of cardboard to fit inside the container. Gently press the cardboard onto the soil to create a flat, even surface.
- Mesclun seed mixes are a good choice for microgreens, but you can do single-crop microgreens as well. Scatter the seeds over the entire soil surface, then place the cardboard over the seeds and lightly press them into the soil.
- Using a coarse wire-mesh sieve, sift a very fine (¼-inch) layer of dry potting mix over the seeds.
- Set the container onto a drip tray and then carefully water the seeds in with a gentle shower from a watering can, meat baster, or spray bottle – be careful not to dislodge the seeds!
- Place the tray on a sunny, windowsill or under grow lights. Expect the seeds to germinate in 3 to 7 days.
- Keep the soil consistently moist. Prevent soggy soil by pouring off any excess water that collects in the drip tray after watering.
- To harvest, snip the microgreens right above the soil line when their first true leaves unfurl after germination (7-14 days, depending on the green). **Enjoy these nutritional powerhouses on salads, sandwiches, pizza, etc.!**



Adapted from: <https://www.rodalorganiclife.com/garden/growing-microgreens>