

Spring Vegetable Gardening March Newsletter



Patty's Plants

The Seeds have been Started, What's next?

March is that difficult month where we desperately want to get out in the garden and plant. The winter may have seemed to have been longer and colder than usual. (I think it was actually colder). We may feel like planting now. Especially if we get a few days that seem warm enough to get started. We must be patient just a little while longer. This is also the month some of us find out if we started our seeds way to early. They may have become very weak and are stretching, getting leggy. What do we do now? The worst case scenario is you'll need to plant them over again. Florescent lighting is needed from the beginning when



the seedlings are growing so they don't get leggy. We really can't plant outside until the middle of April for our cool weather crops and middle to end of May for other crops like tomatoes and peppers. In this newsletter I will give tips on what type of seeds can be planted directly into the garden in early spring. I will also give planting instructions for asparagus, rhubarb, seed potatoes. Plus a couple fresh spring vegetable recipes.

Patty

Weather Permitting

These are all the early vegetable seeds and root crops I plant around April 15, as long as the weather is working with me. Asparagus (roots), beet seed, carrot seed, chard seed, kohlrabi seed, lettuce seed, onion sets, parsnip seed, pea seed, seed potatoes (early, midseason, late), radish seed, rhubarb root, spinach seed. The first thing to remember is the ground has to be not so wet as to rot what we plant early. If you till your

garden in the spring, you must wait until the soil is drying out. If you till while the soil is still wet it will be hard and clumpy, when it does start to dry out you will need to till it all over again. You certainly can't plant in rock hard clumps. Around May 1st I plant broccoli, kohlrabi, onions, lettuce, cauliflower, cabbage and brussel sprouts all as plants.

March 2011

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**Seed Starting isn't
for everyone....
That's one of the reasons
Patty's Plants
is here.**

**We will carry locally grown
natural & certified
organic vegetable
and herbs plants
just for you. Many are
heirloom varieties
with no GMO's
(genetically modified organism)**

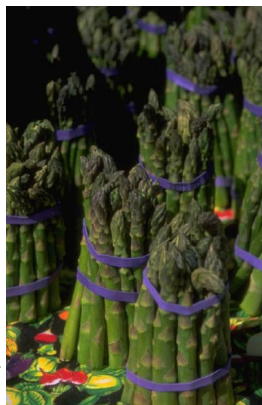
Planting Asparagus

Plant asparagus in early spring, after the soil has warmed up to about 50 degrees F. There is no advantage to planting the crowns earlier in cold, wet soils.

They will not grow until the soil warms and there is danger of the plants being more susceptible to disease if crowns are exposed to cold, wet soils over a prolonged period. Plant the asparagus where it will not shade the other vegetables and will not be injured when the rest of the garden is tilled.

Make sure you pick an area that has good drainage. Asparagus roots do not like waterlogged soils that will lead to root rot. It prefers a soil pH of 6.5-7.5 and will not do well if the pH is less than 6.0. There are soil test kits available or you can call your county extension office to find out where to send a soil sample in.

It is best to plant an all male variety like Jersey Knight. This variety produces spears only on male plants. Seeds produced on female plants fall to the ground and become a seedling weed problem in the garden. Female plants also have to use more energy to produce the seeds and that decreases the yields of asparagus spears on female plants. The all-male hybrids out-yield the old Mary Washington varieties by 3 to 1. Dig a trench no deeper than 5 to 6 inches. You



don't need to plant them deeper as it doesn't produce any higher yields and may even decrease the yield.

Mix the soil with good organic planting mix or compost. Then use a higher phosphate additive like bonemeal to get the roots off to a good start. Spread the roots out over the bonemeal. They should be placed 12-18" apart in rows 3ft apart. After planting, you can gradually cover the crowns with a few inches of soil as the asparagus spears grow, until the trench is filled in. You can also fill it in all at once but you must make sure you don't compact the soil in that area or the asparagus will be severely reduced. Spears should show growth within one

week in moist soils.

Do not harvest the asparagus during the planting year. The spears grow into ferns. The ferns produce food for the plant and then move it down to the crown for next year's spear growth.

Asparagus is very drought tolerant and can usually grow without extra watering because it finds moisture deep in the soil. However, if it doesn't rain when planting or afterwards, you should water the crowns. Otherwise the plants will become stressed and won't grow as well.

Simply Delicious Asparagus Soup

Matthew & Sarah Smith, Blue Valley Gardens
From: MACSAC Cookbook

8 Tablespoons (1 Stick) butter

3 1/2-4 cups chopped onions

8 cups chicken stock

2 pounds asparagus

1/2 cup cream

Salt & pepper to taste

Fresh lemon thyme or dill to taste

Heat butter in soup pot, add onions, cook until tender. Add stock; bring to boil. Cut tips off asparagus; reserve. Chop stems and add to pot. Simmer gently until asparagus is very tender, 15-20 minutes. Puree in a

food processor and return to pot. Add tips; cook gently 5-10 minutes. Stir in cream, salt and pepper. Add lemon thyme or dill; if you use dried herbs, add them to the onions as they cook.

Makes 8-10 servings

- Asparagus is packed full of antioxidant vitamins A, B, C, K.
- Asparagus is a member of the lily family and comes from the Greek word meaning "shoot" or "sprout."
- It is believed to have originated 2,000 years ago in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Planting Seed Potatoes

Crop rotation is a must with potatoes. Never plant potatoes in the same area of the garden each year; the entire crop could be lost to disease and insect problems. Tomatoes, potatoes, peppers and eggplant are in the same nightshade family and can get the same disease and insect problems. Rotate with a crop something other than those such as beans, squash or corn. Rotating will help control diseases, insects and weeds. Potato yield and quality will be improved with rotation. Use generous amounts of organic matter: compost, leaves, straw tilled in every year. Potatoes are happiest in soil that is high in organic matter like composted manure, mushroom compost or organic planting mix. Any of these added to your soil will all help promote plant health use the best Certified Organic Seed Potatoes available. (Patty's List of Seed Potatoes is in the February 2011 newsletter). The best soil acidity range for potatoes is between 4.8 and 5.4 pH. On soils with a pH of 5.5 to 7.0, the potatoes can be infected with a disease called scab. Lime should not be used unless a soil test indicates a pH below 4.8. Potatoes are the only vegetable for which this pH is recom-

mended. Warm seed potatoes or greensprout prior to planting.

Five pounds of nonfingerling seed tubers plants 40-50 feet of row unless otherwise noted. Five pounds of fingerling seed tubers will plant about 120 feet of row. Cut seed tubers into pieces containing at least two eyes. You can plant the entire seed potatoes if you want to but you can get many more plants if you cut them. Let the cut ends scab over before planting. Plant shallow for fast emergence; 1" deep, hill soil around plants 2-3 times beginning when they are 4-6 inches high. Topdress with organic granular vegetable fertilizer after planting. Use mulch, like straw to promote more growth above the soil level. Regularly handpick and control insect pests. If you must use a spray for pests or diseases please use an organic product. Harvest anytime you please after tubers reach marble size.

To harvest for storage, wait until the tops are completely dead. Then dig and store in moist, dark area, 40° (best) to 50°.

Green Sprouting, Warming or Chitting

Green Sprouting is a method you can use to try to produce potatoes earlier than their normal maturity date. It has been practiced in Europe for years.

Here's how to do it: Spread seed potatoes out in a single layer in an area exposed to light. This can be done on a floor indoors or out, as long as the temperature doesn't drop below freezing. The ideal condition to green sprout potatoes is 65- 70 degrees F with high humidity. Even a barn or garage in early spring will work well. Turn the potatoes over to en-

courage uniform sprouts. Green sprouting will produce short stubby (less than 1 inch) sprouts that emerge quickly about 5-7 days and will then set tubers earlier. Only keep 2-3 sprouts per cut section, rub off excess.

By green sprouting you will be able to harvest 2-3 weeks earlier.

Source: www.umext.maine.edu



Container Gardening with Potatoes

Ever think of growing a few potato plants in bushel baskets or smart pots(an aeration container)? Well, you can — it's easy and fun. You can be a potato grower in the smallest yard or just on the back porch or patio.

Line a bushel basket with landscape fabric or plastic, if plastic punch a few holes in the bottom. Use a good organic potting soil or planting mix. Put a 4- or 5-inch layer of soil in the



*Picture from
Gardeners Supply
Patty's carries
variety of sizes*

basket and lay a few seed pieces 6 to 8 inches apart, then top with 3 or 4 more inches of soil. You may topdress with an organic granular fertilizer or add some to the container when planting.

Keep the basket in a warm, sunny place. As the plants grow, add more soil around the stems to give the tubers room to expand, and keep the container watered when needed.

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Natural & Organic Garden Supply



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Rhubarb Cake Submitted by Lonnie Brown

Wash & cut enough rhubarb to make 3 cups.

Sift together:

2 cups flour

1 1/2 cups white sugar

1 teaspoon baking soda

1/4 teaspoon salt

Cut this into 1/2 stick of butter or margarine.

Add to the Rhubarb and mix well. Set aside.

Then mix together in a separate bowl:

1 cup buttermilk

1 egg

1 teaspoon vanilla

Add to flour/rhubarb mixture, mix well.

Spread into a greased 9x 13 pan

Sprinkle with cinnamon sugar

(1 teaspoon cinnamon to 4 teaspoons sugar)

Bake at 350* for 40-45 minutes.

Rhubarb

Rhubarb is a very easy perennial to grow.

The planting area should be thoroughly weeded before planting. Rhubarb roots are normally planted as early as possible in the spring since growth begins when soil temperatures are still well below 50° F. Plant with the crown bud 2 inches below the soil surface. Space the roots 36 to 48 inches apart in rows approximately 4 feet apart. Work plenty of well-rotted manure or compost into the rhubarb bed before planting. Since rhubarb is a perennial, it should be planted to one side or at the end of the garden so as not to interfere with tilling the garden for other vegetables. Plant (or divide) rhubarb roots in early spring while the plants are still dormant, in well drained soil. Old roots may be dug and divided to make new plantings by cutting the roots into no more than eight pieces. Each piece must have at least one strong bud. Flower/seed stalks should be cut off as soon as they appear.

Lime can be applied to maintain the soil pH in a

range of 6.0 to 6.8. Rhubarb has a high nitrogen requirement. Seabird Guano would be a good organic fertilizer for rhubarb. Fertilizing with a handful of a organic fertilizer in the spring and topdressing mid-summer will also benefit these vigorous nitrogen loving plants.

Do not harvest rhubarb during the first year of planting. Newly planted rhubarb needs all their foliage to build a strong root system. Stalks may be harvested for 1 or 2 weeks during the second year and for 8 to 10 weeks (a full harvest season) after that. Harvesting in the fall is only recommended when the plants are to be discarded the next season. The stalk are the only edible part of the plant. The leaves are toxic and can be absorbed into the bloodstream. Please wear gloves when harvesting.

Patty's will carry Rhubarb plants grown by Roots Down Farm, Milton's local CSA (Community Supported Agriculture).