



Patty's Plants

February Hours

Tues-Sat. - 9-5



February 09 Newsletter



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Gardening In The Winter

This is the time of year we as gardeners get the itch to want to start growing something. Yeah, so maybe we can't grow anything outside here in the northland. (My friends down south are laughing because they are already growing peas and radishes). But does that mean it should stop us? I say NO. If any of you have a houseplant, you are actually indoor gardening every time you go to water or check on your plants. Now, for some of us, we want to do more than take care of our houseplants. We want to taking cuttings or get our seeds started for our outdoor gardens this spring. In this newsletter I have helpful tips on how to do this. My products for seed starting should be in

soon or are in as I'm righting this in January. Make sure you check the outdoor planting times on the seed packets and figure out how long it takes the seed to germinate indoors. You don't want to start them too early. I have listed a few of the items I will be carrying. I have also included growing herbs indoors as plants. I wish I had some small herbs to sell right now but all I have is rosemary. It is doing very nicely here in the shop and smells so good.

There are many insects that bother house plants indoors this time of year but the one that seems the most annoying to us is the Fungus Gnat. You will find info on page 4 of this pest.



Grafting and Pruning

Plant Seal is a non-toxic sealant suitable for use on injured trees, freshly-grafted plants and specimens used to supply cuttings. Gardeners simply apply to the affected area to form a protective bandage, keeping essential moisture in and trouble-causing pests and pathogens out. Plant Seal is completely water-soluble for easy clean-up.

Rootstock Gel

(.02-0.1) may be used for most soft-stem and semi-hard wood cuttings. Rootstock is the **ONLY** organic cloning gel. Made from soybeans, kelp meal and sulfate of potash.



- Products used when taking cuttings

Seed Starting

Starting herbs, veggies or flowers from seed can be a fun winter project. Wouldn't we agree that we're all a bit tired of this weather. I myself need to get my hands dirty in that good rich organic soil.

Here are a few things to think about when starting your seeds whether they be herbs, veggies or flowers:

First, do not start them too early. They can get weak, stretch and won't be strong enough to go outside when it's time. You should have a sunny south window or artificial lighting. This is a must when starting seeds.

Next, not all seeds should be started at the same time. Look at the seed packet to see how long each plant needs to grow indoors and when it can be transplanted. We must also know when our last "safe" frost date is, which is usually around May 20th in southern Wisconsin. Watch the weather reports to get an idea when they're predicting our weather to warm up. That's actually kind of funny because Mother Nature will warm things up when she wants to. She could give us a surprise frost anytime she feels like it.

When picking out containers, they can be new or used. If used make sure you clean them well with a solution of white vinegar and mild dish soap.

You can use old pots, flats, or even those plastic containers they put our leftovers in from our favorite restaurant. (the ones with the clear covers are perfect).

I will have these seed starting pots:

Eco Pots– 100% Biodegradable, made with coir fiber not peat. You can plant directly in the ground.

Nest Pots- "All-in-One" Seed Starting Kit. 100% biodegradable a mini cylinder filled with coir growing mix. It provides optimum breathability and retains water for the roots. It comes in a kit with a top that acts as a greenhouse lid and converts to a watering reservoir when growth begins.

Use a good seed starting mix for your seeds. **Black Gold Seedling Mix**. Approved by the Organic Materials Review Institute (OMRI), Seedling Mix consists of perlite, dolomite lime, double-screened Canadian Sphagnum peat moss and an organic wetting agent.

Available in a 16-quart bag, this is a light medium great for germinating most plant varieties.

It's best to moisten the mix first. Then follow the instructions on the seed pack when starting them. Most annuals, veggies and herbs are easier to start than perennials.



nials. Some perennials need cold treatment before planting. You may have to do a little research if your starting those. When starting large seeds use this **tip** :

Soak them for a few hours or over night to soften the shell and speed up germination. Some very hard seeds, like Nasturtiums, should be nicked then soaked. You can use a metal nail file to make a hole through the seed coat. Be careful you don't nick too deep, though!

Labeling is very important! Did you save all those popsicle sticks this summer? Don't worry I will have wooden and metal labels to use.

When labeling your pots, you might want to put the time of seeding along with the type of plant it is. Save the seed packet to refer to when they are ready to go outside.

As far as carrying for your seedlings, if you have already dampened the seedling mix you won't need to put a lot of water on the planted seeds. A spray bottle is very useful to have near by. Do not soak the soil or let it dry out too much. Keep evenly moist.

Cover the pots or containers with a lid or plastic bag this will hold in warmth and humidity. Most seeds do not need light to germinate but do need heat and moisture. Some seeds need darkness. Check your seed package or seed catalog for recommendations. To speed up germination give them bottom heat. Place the planted pots in a warm location, for example, near the gentle heat of a closed furnace register, on top of a clothes dryer, near the furnace, or on the top of the refrigerator.

This mini **Hot House** is a growing system that offers increased growing success by providing gentle warmth to the planting bed and by controlling humidity under the large dome. System includes: UL listed waterproof heat mat, 17 watt, 120 volt, 6.5" humidity dome with dual vent points, 11" x 22" watertight base tray, 72 cell seedling insert.

When the seeds begin to sprout remove the cover and place the pots in direct light near a window or under a grow light that is 2 to 4 inches above the seedlings. Move the light higher as the plants grow. 12 to 14 hours or light per day is recommended.



Veggie seed planting chart page 7 or continue on for hardening off , damping off & fungus gnat control.

Hardening Off

Hardening off means you need to acclimate your seedlings so they can adjust to real sunlight, wind and cooler temperatures. They are very tender and could be burned by a nice sunny day or shocked by cold wind. Here's how to harden off your seedlings:

Place them outside in a protected area with filtered



Seedlings need strength before getting planted outside in the weather.

light. Start with 2-3 hours of sun gradually lengthening the time and giving more and more sun exposure. Bring them inside or cover them during cold nights. If it's raining out make sure you remove any saucer or container that might hold water, you don't want to drown your new seedlings after get-

ting this far. In a couple of weeks they will be strong enough and ready for planting in the garden. Don't forget to watch the weather for possible frosty nights.

As far as any plants you may want to move out in the early spring, follow the same process. Tropicals need night temperatures in the upper 50's to low 60's.

Damping Off Disease

This is one of most depressing things that can happen when starting your own seeds. Your seedlings are all coming up nicely, you check them before going to bed, there's a smile on your face, sweet dreams. The next morning you hurry to look at your new seedlings (even before making coffee). With a smile on your face, you see them, the smile is turning upside down. You want to scream, cry or both. They were standing last night, now they're all flopped over. Gone, they are all gone. All that time and work, what happened?

Damping-off is what happened. It is a fungal disease that can kill seedlings overnight. The fungus rots the stems at the soil surface, causing the seedlings to fall over and die. Why did this happen? To crowded, to wet, soil to cold, soil to heavy, there are a number of reasons this might have hap-

pened. Try these ideas to help prevent it.

Natural Preventative Solutions

Improved circulation Don't plant to close together or snip off extra seedlings early. Being over crowned can lead to damping off. Make sure your soil isn't staying to wet. Put a small fan near by to keep air moving.

Warm the soil to help seeds germinate and grow faster. Use a heating mat or put them on top of the refrigerator

Chamomile tea add 2 handfuls of fresh or 2 tablespoons (25ml) dried chamomile flowers to 4 cups (1l) water. Steep for 2-3 days. Strain and use the water on seedlings. You can also use a tea bag with 2 cups of water.

Cinnamon Sprinkle cinnamon on

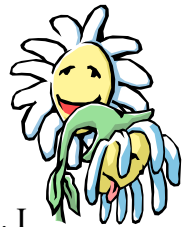
the top of the soil, it acts as a natural fungicide.

Compost Tea When you water, use a solution of compost tea. I carry this in tea bag form, ready to go, easy to use.

Sand or Perlite Sprinkle a thin layer of sand or perlite on the surface of the soil. This step will keep the stems dry at the soil surface where damping-off occurs.

These are all suggestions to try. Some people believe in them others don't. They can't hurt to try and they could put that smile back on your face.

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Fungus Gnats

Why do I have these annoying insects? Most people assume gnats are only brought in by houseplants. They can also come from slow-running drains, moisture-accumulating cracks and crevices, refrigerator drain pans, and other places where fungi and slime accumulate.

We just notice them more in the winter. Our houses are all closed up. The days are more gloomy, plants don't dry out as quickly. Where is a bug to go? Simple, in your plants, the ones that are staying to wet or are not as

healthy as they once were. Bugs seem to know when a plant is having a bad time of it. They do like plants that are staying to wet the best. Fungus gnats do not bite, like those pesky Asian Beetles. (That's another story)

They are completely harmless, except for the fact that they are sooo annoying flying in your face or up your nose.

When they are numerous, look for damp soil and moisture problems. They lay their eggs in the top layer of a very moist area. Such as a plant staying to wet.

The larva eats on rotting matter. So a plant that may be staying wet to long is the perfect spot for them to raise their children. It takes 3 to 4 days for the babies to hatch. Each mom lays 100 to 200 eggs at a time. Once they mature and fly out off the soil they mate, lay eggs and die after being alive for only 5 to 7 days. If each baby lays that many eggs and they all hatch, it would seem like we will never get rid of them, the cycle just keeps going and going. We can get rid of them without repotting every plant. We can win!

Controlling Fungus Gnats

The first step is to let your plants dry slightly between watering. This will help since gnats only lay they eggs on the top layer of soil. The first inch or so can be dry without hurting your plants. Here are a couple of natural products you can use to control them.

GoGnats is a cedar oil that safely controls fungus gnats, mites, thrips, aphids, whiteflies, moths, mosquitoes and more. Liquid concentrated GoGnats can be mixed as a foliar spray, spray the top of the soil or add directly to a hydroponic reservoir for systemic treatments. Great for use indoors and out, this natural pesticide also comes in handy for establishing a preemptive pest-free perimeter.

Bacillus thuringiensis (var. israelensis). It is sold under the

trade name of Gnatrol. The bacteria must be eaten by the larva. Gnatrol only stays active for two days and will require repeat applications. I do not carry Gnatrol however I do carry Mosquito Bits which has the same active ingredient in it. You may try this: Put a small amount in a watering can, after it dissolves, water your plants with it.

Cinnamon sprinkled on the soil. It kills the soil fungus that the gnats feed on. Without a food source, the gnats die off.

Cider Vinegar Put a cup of cider vinegar near your plants. The adult fly is attracted to it and will drown.

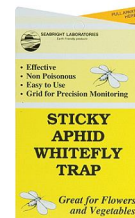
Sand put about a 1/2 inch of sand on the top of the soil. The gnat can not hatch out because the sand is to heavy.

Gnat Stix can be mounted anywhere flying insects are a con-

cern. The sticky yellow paper attracts gnats and whiteflies . Each package comes with six sticks and 12 sticky papers. The sticks may be used individually or combined end-to-end for greater height.

Sticky Aphid/Whitefly Traps unfold to expose adhesive on both sides to cover approximately 30 square inches per trap. Yellow coloration of weather-proof cards attracts aphids, gnats, whiteflies, leafhoppers, froghoppers, moths, and more.

Don't forget to let your plants dry slightly between watering.



Growing Herbs Indoors

Herbs may not grow as lush as they do outside but they will grow and you can use them anytime you need to be refreshed.

Even if you don't want to cook with them — just smelling them can brighten even the worst of moods. So have fun, experiment !

Lighting: Herbs will grow very well inside your home or apartment provided there is the right amount of light. Sunny south windows are the best, but if you only have east or west will do. Fluorescent lights are better than incandescent because they give off less heat. An inexpensive shop light with two standard 48" tubes will be enough for several pots. Hang or mount it 6" above the top of the tallest plants. Raise shorter plants up. Get a timer or turn it off after 14 hrs. or so.

Plants that work well in artificial : Sweet bay, lemon verbena, eucalyptus, curry, lemon grass, pineapple sage, and scented geraniums. Windowsill plants include: rosemary, tarragon, lemon balm, sage, thyme, oregano, bay, and aloe vera.

Containers: There are many containers that will work for herbs. Terra-cotta, plastic, metal (like an old soup can), an old shoe or boot, and a clay strawberry jar. By using a clay pot there is less chance of over watering because the clay absorbs the extra moisture. Plastic pots hold moisture longer. Always make sure the containers have good drainage holes. I have two herb gardens in enamel-ware cooking pots with holes drilled in. They look great in my kitchen. Whatever the container you choose it should be slightly larger than the root ball. **Tip:** Use tubing with holes in down to center of strawberry jar for easier watering.

Soil: A organic potting mix is a good start. I prefer to add some worm castings to the soil if it doesn't have it . Herbs like a little heavier mix and worm castings give them the natural nutrients they need.

Tip: Always use moist soil whenever potting, It is easier to work with, it doesn't fly up in your face and you won't have to add extra soil after it settles.

Humidity: Herbs like humidity. Most homes tend to be very dry in the winter. If you have an humidifier great, if not you can create it by using a tray with pebbles and water filled in it . Just make sure the container is sitting above the water level.

Water: You will have to watch your herbs closely. Some dry out faster than others. However, most like to be on the dry side. Many more plants have been killed by over watering. Always feel the soil first. Use a wooden chopstick to test if your herbs need water. Stick it down in the container, when you pull it up is it wet or dry? This will help you will know when to water.

Fertilize: Fertilize a couple times during the winter with a week solution of organic fertilizer. If you've used worm casting in the potting mix you won't need to fertilize all winter. Homemade fertilizer— Use crush eggshells and add to the top of the soil or blend them with veggie peels, lettuce and a little water. Liquefy —and serve to your herbs for dinner.

Herbs can be sprayed weekly with a mild solution of a dish soap and water whether they have any bugs or not to keep the clean. This also helps keep pests down to a minimum.

See Topic of
"Homemade Insecticides and Fungicides."

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South, southeast windows are best!

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► Natural & Organic
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Patty's Plants

Cyclamen- *Cyclamen persicum*



One of our Valentine's Day favorite gift plants. It enjoys a cool room (65-68). "The cooler the room the longer the bloom". Place them in a bright area but no direct sun. A north or east window would be the best. This plant grows from a corm and is very easy to over water. So let it dry slightly between watering. The cyclamen will bloom from Sept. to March. It does go dormant when if your home is to warm or the weather gets to hot. Most people throw it out at this point.*

Go to www.pattysplants.com for more on:

Cyclamen Care.

Taking Stem Cuttings

If you have any plants, like geraniums that you would like to take cuttings of, here are a few steps:

You should cut short lengths (3-5") of newer growth with two or more nodes. A node is like a joint or area where the leaves/branches come out of the stem.

The rooting media should be moist but not wet. You can use seed starting mix, sand, peat-perlite, vermiculite, or perlite (Geraniums). When taking the cuttings make a slanting cut just below a node, use a sharp knife or snap off cleanly.

You'll want to remove all but the top 3-4 leaves as well as all flowers and flower buds.

The cut surface of Geraniums, Cacti or thick stemmed cuttings should heal over for a few hours before planting. A rooting hormone may be used on the cut surface to help with rooting.

Use a pencil or dowel to make a hole in the soil,

then stick the cutting into the soil 1/2 to 2/3 its length. No leaves should be below soil surface.

Water the cuttings slightly. You can use a plastic covering over the pot to keep in humidity and warmth while rooting.

Make sure the soil isn't staying too wet. Place in good, indirect light, keep temps between 65 - 72 degrees F.

You can repot when new roots are 1/2 to 1 inch in length. Gently pull the pot off to look at the roots only if you think they may be taking root nicely.



Southern Wisconsin Vegetable Planting Guide

<u>Vegetable</u>	<u>Planning Time</u>	
	<u>Indoors</u>	<u>Outdoors</u>
Asparagus		April 15
Bean, bush lima		May 25
Bean, bush & pole		May 10
Beet		April 15
Broccoli	March 15	(Plants) May 1
Brussels sprouts		(Seeds) May 15
Cabbage, early	March 15	(Plants) May 1
Cabbage, late		(Seeds) May 15
Carrot		April 15
Cauliflower	March 15	(Plants) May 1
Chard		April 15
Corn		May 10 & May 25
Cucumbers		(Seeds) June 1
Eggplant	March 15	(Plants) June 1
Kohlrabi		April 15
Lettuce, leaf	March 15	(Plants) May 1
Muskmelon	May 1	(Plants) May 20
Onion	Feb. 15	(Plants) May 1
Onion sets		April 15
Parsnip		April 15
Pea		April 15
Pepper	April 1	(Plants) June 1
Potato, early, midseason		April 15
Potato, late		April 15
Pumpkin	May 1	(Seeds) May 10 (Plants) May 20
Radish		April 15
Rhubarb		April 15
Spinach		April 15
Squash, summer		May 20
Squash, winter	May 1	(Plants) May 20
Tomato	April 15	(Plants) May 20
Watermelon		May 20