



February 2015

Greetings!

Hopefully everyone is thinking forward to spring in the garden.

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For more information about these or other topics please contact:

Amanda Greer
CEA-Agriculture
870-921-4744
agreer@uaex.edu

Indoor Seed Starting

Purchase seeds from a reputable company. Choose varieties that are adapted for your area. If possible make sure the varieties have good disease resistance to common problems. (This is also important later on if buying transplants.) Be aware that some types of plants do not transplant well and should not be started indoors from seed.

Follow the guidelines specified on the packaging as to when to start the seed. This is generally related to when one plans on transplanting them into the garden. Lafayette County is in USDA Hardiness Zone 8. Typically seeds are started about four weeks prior to transplant date.

Use quality seed starting mix and clean containers. If one is reusing containers used in previous years, they should be cleaned using a 10% bleach solution and rinsed well. One way to do this is to take a 5 gal bucket and filling it with bleach solution and submerging the containers completely into the solution, letting them set for a minute or so and then rinsing with clean water. Containers do not necessarily have to be store bought. Any container that will hold starting mix and has drainage holes punched in them will work just fine; old jugs, butter containers, etc. Since they will be indoors, I would suggest setting them in some sort of tray to keep the water from draining all over where it shouldn't. Often the starting mix purchased is very dry and contains quite a bit of peat. This type of mix should be wetted prior to use. This can be done in a bucket overnight. The mix should be damp but not soaking wet at the time of planting.

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Plant the seeds according to the depths specified on the package for each type of seed. Typically small seeds are planted much shallower than larger seeds.

To retain humidity, the containers may be covered with plastic wrap during germination. Do not leave the plastic wrap on too long after the plants begin growing or fungal issues/damping off may occur. If fungal growth occurs on the soil surface before the plants emerge then there is too much moisture and the plastic will need to be removed or loosened to increase air flow and allow some soil drying.

The containers should be kept in a warm location until the plants emerge after which it is important to make sure they have adequate light. Place them in a south facing window. If money allows, they can be kept under fluorescent grow lights but these type setups can be expensive.

As soon as the young plants get their first leaves they need fertilized with a mild water soluble starter fertilizer, unless the starter mix already had fertilizer mixed in. The young plants should be kept watered but not allowed to sit in water.

When it gets closer to time to transplant the young plants into the garden, they will need to be 'hardened off' or acclimated to the outdoors. This may be done by setting the containers outdoors during the day and bringing them in at night. Do not set them directly into full sun on the first time out. Gradually expose the young plants to the sunlight each day until they can be in full sun. Continue hardening them off for a couple weeks or so. Be aware the containers can dry quickly in the sun and wind so a close eye must be kept on them to keep them from wilting. Water accordingly.

Live plants beginning to arrive at retailers at this time are:
Potatoes, Onions, Blueberries, Grapes, Roses, Spring bulbs, Fruit trees, Blackberries/Raspberries

Soil Considerations

Consider taking a soil sample from your garden location. Soil samples brought to our office are submitted FREE of charge to the state soil lab in Marianna. A soil sample will help you understand what nutrients are in your soil and what fertilizer may be needed. When taking the sample, take multiple small samples from various locations in the garden and mix together in a container. Bring the composite sample by the county Extension office. If you garden in multiple locations on your property, pull additional samples from each location that you need tested.

Peaches

I have recently had questions on peach trees so attached is a fact sheet:

Stone Fruit Production in the Home Garden

It may also be accessed online at:
<http://www.uaex.edu/publications/PDF/FSA-6060.pdf>

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