The Grapevine

Getting the Garden Started

This weekend I finally had some time to work in my basement and spend time with the seedlings that I started about three weeks ago. I’m still not quite sure where I’m going to plant them but I have a decent collection of tomatoes, peppers, herbs of various kinds, petunias, sweet alyssum and two lettuce bowls currently growing happily under fluorescent lights. Now that they are started, let’s talk about the next steps till we can move them outside when the weather decides to cooperate.

Once your seeds have sprouted and started growing, providing enough light is key to keep your seedlings compact and growing strong. If you look closely in the photo at right you can see my tomato seedlings have quickly outgrown the basil seedlings right next to them and have gotten a bit stretched. This was caused by having my light too far away from the flat. To help fix this issue I move the light about 2-4” from the tray and they quickly slowed their growth. My issue was caused by having the dome on my tray for too long trying to encourage the pepper plants to sprout. To help keep the plants compact I also changed the timer on my lights so they were on for a minimum of 14 hours instead of the 12 I had with the rest of my tropical plants. If you continue to have issues with seedlings stretching after moving them closer to the light you can also add a fan blowing across the tray. That will slow the growth as the seedling acclimate to the air flow.

It’s amazing how quickly those seedlings can grow and change. The picture to the left are those same tomato seedlings less than two weeks later. Once the seedlings had developed their first set of true leaves I transplanted them from the Jiffy pellets up to a larger tray. The tomatoes are the fastest growing of my seedlings and needed more room for their roots to grow. It’s also easier to keep the light where I need it for the rest of my plants by moving the tallest plants to their own tray. When you transplant seedlings always hold them by leaves or in my case the peat pellets, never hold them by the stem. A seedling can regrow leaves if they are torn off on accident but it will not regrow if the stem is broken. Most vegetables you will plant at the same depth they were growing before. I did plant my tomato seedlings a bit deeper than the peat pellet to compensate for the stretching but tomatoes will root along the stem where other plants will not.

Once I transplanted my tomatoes and watered them in well I then fertilized the tomatoes and lettuce bowls because I was seeing some yellowing of the leaves. I used a soluble houseplant fertilizer at the recommended rate on the label. I will continue to fertilize these little babies every week or two as needed. Ideally my transplants should be dark green in color with short and sturdy stems. If my seedlings continue to have a yellow tint or develop a purple hue I will need to change my fertilizer schedule and fertilize more frequently. It is very important to follow the recommended rates for seedlings because they can be delicate and easily damaged if you overfertilize them. The rest of the seedlings will have to wait for fertilizer till after they are transplanted.

For now these little guys will be hanging out in my basement under grow lights till it warms up. I’m hoping after this week’s cold snap to move the lettuce bowls out to my sun room to adjust to sunlight so I can free up some space inside. Once we get closer to time to move our transplants outside I’ll talk more about hardening them off so they are ready to face the wide world of Kansas wind and sun. Check out the K-STATE Vegetable Planting Guide for more information on when to plant different vegetables outside. Till then happy growing and enjoy your little bit of spring inside!!

Kansas State University is committed to making its services, activities and programs accessible to all participants. If you have special requirements due to a physical, vision, or hearing disability, contact Calla Edwards, KSRE – Butler Co. Horticulture Agent, 316-321-9660.

Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service
K-State Research and Extension is an equal opportunity provider and employer.
Reminders-

- Once temperatures are consistently over 50 degrees or when plants start growing clean up the perennial bed by cutting back foliage and removing the winter mulch layer. Divide any perennials and plant back in the garden.
- If you haven’t, start your tomato, pepper and other warm season vegetable seeds.
- Sharpen and repair your garden tools. Now is the time to have your lawn mower and other equipment serviced before the gardening season begins.
- Spray peach trees for Peach Leaf Curl and plum trees for control of Black Knot.
- Apply Dormant Oil on fruit trees to control scale and mites.
- Check your houseplants for unwanted visitors.

Upcoming Events

- **March 10, 2022- Vegetable Gardening in Small Spaces**
  Are you interested in growing your own vegetables but live in an apartment, have a shady back yard or have a physical limitation that prevents you from gardening in the ground? Container vegetable gardening is a great way to grow your own vegetables on your window sill, patio, porch or even your front step. Join us to learn how to grow your own tomatoes, corn, beans and potatoes in containers or raised beds! Please call our office at 316-9660 to register or [click here](#) so we have enough handouts and space for everyone!

- **April 6, 2022: Pollinator Plants for Continuous Food Sources**
  Include plants for pollinators in your spring planting plan! Providing season-long pollen and nectar sources in the garden is critical for our pollinators to forage on, and an important way to help increase local pollinator numbers. Join Jason Graves, Central Kansas District Horticulture Extension Agent, to learn about the planting strategies and pollinator garden plants that will help you supply pollinators with the critical foraging habitat they need. For more information on KSRE Garden Hour [click here](#).