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### 21 January 18 PSAs

It's time to order garden seeds. If you're wondering if leftover seed is viable or if you should order new, check to see what date the seed was packaged. Most seed remains viable about 3 years, however, germination decreases with age. Older seed may need to be planted more thickly. Also, some seed is shorter-lived. For example, plants in the carrot family are usually viable 1 to 2 years. To check seed viability, place 10 seeds on a paper towel moistened with warm water and cover with another moist towel. Roll these up and place inside a plastic bag with a few holes for air exchange. Place the bag in a warm place like the top of the refrigerator. Re-moisten towels with warm water as needed. After the first week, check for germination. Remove and count all sprouted seeds, then check again in another week. Add these two numbers to determine the percent germination. (Ward Upham, Kansas State)

With more people gardening last year, some garden transplants were in short supply. If you're considering growing your own transplants, know it can be challenging to grow sturdy transplants that perform well in the garden. Be sure to learn about correct lighting, temperature and growing medium needed. And avoid a common mistake made which is starting seed too early. Depending on what you're growing, most seed should be started only 4 to 8 weeks prior to the expected outdoor planting date. And it varies for plant type. For cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, and eggplant, seed is started about 8 weeks before the outdoor planting date; tomatoes about six weeks before; and cucumber, muskmelon, squash and watermelon only 4 weeks ahead. Know that these last four vine crops are very easy to direct seed into the garden, and that may be the best route to go for home gardeners.

If you're planning to grow your own garden transplants, start at the correct time which is usually six to eight weeks before the outdoor planting date, know if seed needs darkness or light to germinate, and provide good lighting. Most plants germinate in darkness or light but some require darkness, like Phlox and Verbena; and others require light, such as Begonia, Coleus, Geranium, Impatiens, petunia and Snapdragon; and their seed should not be covered by soil. All plants require adequate light once they emerge. South facing windows may not provide enough light so fluorescent or LED fixtures are used. Suspend fluorescent lights 2 to 4 inches above plants. Use LED lights designed specifically to grow plants and follow manufacturer directions. For growing transplants, leave lights on for 16 hours each day, not any shorter and not any longer. (Source: Ward Upham, Kansas State)

Dormant oils are applied to dormant plants to help manage pests that overwinter on plants, mainly scale insects and mites. Dormant oils reduce a wide range of insects and mites and can be less harmful to beneficial insects. While dormant oils may be applied most any time during plant dormancy, their likely to be more effective if applied in mid to late winter when pests are in a weakened state. In Nebraska, late February into March is the ideal time to apply dormant oils. There is a risk of phytotoxicity, or damage to plants, from dormant oils. To avoid plant damage, read label directions for use, application timing, and a list of plants products should not be applied to. Always apply dormant oils to plants before bud break to avoid tender plant tissue being damaged. Make applications when temperatures will remain above freezing, ideally above 40 degrees F., for 24 hours and continually agitate the spray solution.

If you're itching to do some yard work on a mild winter day, stay away from pruning spring blooming shrubs. While February and March are okay to good times to prune some shrubs, if spring blooming shrubs, such as lilac, forsythia, some Spirea, chokeberry and serviceberry, are pruned at this time, flower buds will be removed and blooming will be lost or greatly reduced for this year. Spring blooming shrubs develop their flower buds during the previous season and so bloom on last year's growth. If these shrubs are pruned any time from late summer up until spring flowering, flower buds will be removed. The shrub will not be harmed, and it will bloom again the next spring. If renovation pruning is needed, where a large amount of wood is removed, it's fine to prune shrubs prior to blooming. But for light thinning and heading back of most spring blooming shrubs, wait until just after they bloom in spring to prune.