

Yard and Garden - 03-09-2013 - Ted Griess / Extension Horticulture Assistant

By this time, most gardeners are itching to rush outdoors and start gardening. Although spring is officially eleven days away, I offer a word of caution before launching too many gardening activities. Even I find it difficult to restrain. I'd like to start raking and cleaning our flower borders, but, for now, I realize I must wait. Most likely, winter weather will continue for another month and possibly more. Although one may see tulips, daffodils, crocus and other spring flowers peeking above the ground, they are best left undisturbed.

What can a gardener do to satisfy this burning desire? Two things immediately come to mind. Should you have shade and/or fruit trees that need pruning, now is still an opportune time to complete that task. This particular window of gardening activity remains open for only a few more weeks. Once trees start actively growing it is best to hold off on the pruning.

Perhaps this year might be the year you consider growing more things from seed rather than buying seedling transplants. If so, now is a great time to plan what plants you desire to grow and to purchase seeds while they remain readily available.

Did you know that growing plants from seeds offers numerous advantages compared with growing plants from purchased transplants?

Growing from seed can be viewed as an inexpensive way to have more plants in your garden or flower border. Often an individual seed packet contains forty or more seeds, creating the potential for forty or more new plants. The seed packet may cost around \$1.75 to \$2.50 depending on the variety. A flat of 24 to 36 transplants would cost \$15 to \$20 dollars — perhaps, even more. Growing from seed definitely represents significant monetary savings.

Planting seeds is a great way to add variety. When purchasing only seedlings, selection is often limited to one or two varieties. By purchasing seeds, a plethora of varieties are available and many times unusual varieties not commonly seen are available.

Most gardeners feel a special attachment to growing plants from seeds. I sense a close connection with Mother Nature and marvel at the events that occur when I grow plants from seed. Witnessing the beauty of a flowering plant or harvesting and eating a vegetable produced from a plant that I grew from seed rewards me

with a profound feeling. During this seed growing process, I develop a closer connection to those plants compared with those grown from transplants. Furthermore, growing plants from seeds generates for me an enormous sense of accomplishment and self-reliance.

If you find growing plants from seeds intriguing, now is the opportune time to get started. If vegetable gardening, first consider purchasing seeds of those veggies you enjoy eating; then consider a few others just for fun. Seeds of some vegetables and flowers are best started and grown indoors before setting them out in the landscape as transplants. Also, some plants require a greater degree of skill when starting and growing them from seed.

If you lack experience or you are a novice at seed starting, I suggest you follow the *Home Garden Seed Association's* recommendations. They rate beans, cucumbers, lettuce, peas, pumpkins, radishes, squash, cosmos, sunflowers and zinnias as the ten easiest plants to grow from seed. Furthermore, they all can be directly planted outdoors in the soil when the time is right. The majority of seeds germinate most quickly and successfully when soil temperatures reach 50°F to 55°F.

The itch to begin gardening is definitely here. Although temperatures remain too cold to launch many gardening tasks, I do know if you desire growing plants from seeds, now is the perfect time to plan and purchase your selections.