

As the last few weeks have proven, Nebraska's weather in March is unpredictable. We've had lows down to twenty one degrees, and highs up to seventy three degrees. You don't have to know much about gardening to realize that this kind of temperature fluctuation is not great for plant growth. Especially not new plant growth, which tends to be a little more sensitive to its environment than a plant that is already established. Thankfully, we can start seeds inside so that we can have plants ready to transplant by the time that the danger of frost is past us.

Before you can start planting, make sure that you have all of the necessary supplies. Soil that is light and sterile is very important for seed germination. If the soil is too heavy, it can be difficult for the plant to get above the ground or to put out roots. When I start seeds, I generally go with a mix that is high in vermiculite, because it has a better water holding capacity than perlite. If the soil is not sterile, it could contain diseases that will infect the seedling, which could affect the rate of germination. If your soil mix contains peat moss that has completely dried out, be sure to rehydrate it before planting in it. It can be rehydrated by allowing it to soak in warm water until rehydrated. Depending on how invested you are with growing your seedlings inside, you could use supplemental lighting. The lights will work best if they are able to be moved up and down in order to adjust for the growing height of the plants. Supplemental lighting isn't absolutely necessary for seedling germination. They need to be in a brightly lit area, but out of direct sunlight.

Once you have all of the supplies you need and the area that you're going to put your seedlings prepped and ready to go, you need to do one more thing before you can plant seeds. That one thing is read the label on the packet of seeds! Even if you have planted these seeds before, it is always a good idea to double check the details that you may have forgotten or misremembered. The first thing to check or double check is the recommended planting time. This information is based off where we are located in the United States and our general climate. Keep in mind that our frost free date here in central Nebraska is around the end of April, first of May. This doesn't mean that we won't have frost after the first of May, but on average we don't usually have frost after this time. It's important to keep in mind that your seedlings could be living inside up until this time however.

The next thing to look at before you plant your seeds is the recommended planting depth of the seeds. Seeds start with a limited amount of energy that can't be replaced until they have leaves and can perform photosynthesis. If the seed is planted too deep, it will use all of its energy trying to emerge from the ground and put down roots, and won't have any energy left over to create leaves. Proper planting depth is very important for a good germination rate.

All of the information on the seed packet is important and should be reviewed, but the last main thing to look at is the spacing recommendation. How much space does your final planting destination have? Use the spacing recommendation to figure out how many plants will fit into the space so that you don't overplant. It's great to have a few extra plants so that you can choose the best of them, but I wouldn't want to overplant by a significant amount and then waste good plant material.

When planting seeds, soil should be light and sterile, and the lighting should be bright, but in indirect sunlight. Check the seed packet label for important information like planting times, seed depth, and garden spacing. If you have any questions or would like to suggest a topic for me to write about, feel free to contact me at the Buffalo County Extension Office, at 308-236-1235, or [mearnest2@unl.edu](mailto:mearnest2@unl.edu).