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STARTING WITH SEEDS

When you have finished celebrating the arrival of the new year, it's time to get started on your spring garden. Okay, so maybe you're not actually headed for the garden itself, but if you plan to start seeds to grow your own transplants, it's time to select the seeds, the planting mix, etc.

First, think about what seedlings you want to grow to set out when the frost has gone. By this time our local nurseries probably have seeds in stock. The most successful seedlings to grow are tomatoes, bell peppers and chilies, eggplant, and lettuce. If you just want a good red tomato and perhaps Black Beauty eggplant, the local nurseries will do fine; for a bit more exotic varieties head for the catalogs (or online catalogs). Remember, each seed packet will have 5 to 10 times as many seeds as you need; don't start all of them!

Use some seed starter kits, margarine tubs, whatever, to start the seedlings. They will need to be moved out into individual pots, soon, however. Whatever container is used, let the babies get 1-1/2 to 2" in height before trying to move them. Find a light loose soil medium recommended for starting seeds. When moving the baby seedlings into pots, the planting medium needs to have a bit more texture and some nutrients. Add a little root stimulator and perhaps some fish emulsion when watering after they've moved into the pots.

These little seedlings need 6 to 8 weeks to grow before time to set them out in the garden, so plan your seed starting accordingly. Usually the last week in January is good. The soil needs to be kept damp but definitely not wet. They need light; grow bulbs over them are great. If placing them in front of a window, they will grow toward the light, so turn them often. Pepper seedlings particularly like to be warm. They'll love an old heating pad or heated brick to sit on. Just don't get the electrical parts wet. It's exciting to do this first step in getting your spring garden underway. However, if you're not starting your own transplants, just be planning what you intend to plant.