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Upcoming Classes Offered Both In-Person & Zoom *Please Preregister!*

March 2nd-Having Fun with Seed Saving 6:00pm-7:30pm

Join Agriculture Agent Adam Watson to learn how to successfully save seed in your home garden and landscape. In-person location: Jonesborough Farm Bureau Basement Meeting room, 1103 Boones Creek Rd Jonesborough.

Register for In-Person: tiny.utk.edu/inpersonseed or call 753-1680

Zoom Registration: tiny.utk.edu/seedsaving

More Classes to come! Look for them in the March Issue!

Late Winter/Early Spring Lawn Care Priorities

Crabgrass Control:

If you know crabgrass was a problem last year look to apply a pre-emergent herbicide that prevents crabgrass seed from germinating. The best window for application is Mid-March through Early April. You can use the blooming of Forsythia to help determine the time is at hand; applications should be made before the forsythias drop all their flowers. A second application 6-8 weeks later will increase the period of control as well as possibly controlling later germinating weeds such as goose grass. Always read and follow all label directions.

If using products with crabgrass pre-emergent herbicide and fertilizer examine rate of application to determine if their use will result in excess fertilization which can increase disease problems. See [Crabgrass Species Control in Turfgrass](#) for more info.

Fertility:

March 15: Apply ½ lb. of actual Nitrogen per 1,000 square feet.

April 15: Apply ½ lb. of actual Nitrogen per 1,000 square feet.

Avoid fertilizer applications later than specified as above or at higher rates. Excess fertility can lead to conditions that favor the development of disease. Those looking for lower maintenance lawns can skip the spring fertilization all together, or apply the March recommendation only. Check out the UT-Extension publication [Selecting, Establishing and Maintaining the Fescues](#) for more details.

**Scan to go to our YouTube Channel with
recorded gardening classes.**



<https://tiny.utk.edu/washingtonyoutube>



The Trusty Trowel-February 2023

Forcing Plants in the Winter Garden Marie Taylor, Master Gardener Intern

With a little planning, you can have a variety of green and growing plants throughout the coldest months of the year. “Forcing” will encourage fleshy roots, such as Belgian endive, salsify, dandelion, parsnips and even rhubarb to produce new shoots in the dead of winter. Rhubarb is a hardy perennial in the buckwheat family (Polygonaceae) and is sometimes known as the “pie plant”. Rhubarb is great for forcing.

In general, forcing is done by placing fleshy roots in a completely dark environment. Forcing involves preventing light from reaching the crowns of the rhubarb plants which in turn causes the plant to send up pale stalks perfect for cooking. Forced rhubarb is softer and sweeter than rhubarb harvested in early summer.

How do you do it?

Start with a large mature rhubarb plant crown in late January or February. To boost nutrients and aid growth, apply some well-rotted manure or compost around the base of the rhubarb plant. Remove any weeds or old leaves on the plant.

In late January or during February, cover the entire crown of the rhubarb plant using a large bucket or large nursery pot. Tape any cracks or holes so all light is prevented from reaching the plant. To speed up the process of forcing, you can also insulate the pot by covering the outside of it with straw.

The stems should take about 7-8 weeks before they become large enough for harvesting. Due to the lack of sunlight, plants, and especially the leaves, will be pale in color. By restricting the light source the stems will grow faster in order to seek out sunlight.

Wait until the stalks are around 8 – 10 inches in length before harvesting. Once they have grown, gently pull them from the base of the crown and remove any leaves before washing and cooking the stems. The leaves are poisonous, so don't be tempted to eat them.

Forcing will weaken the plants so they should be given a year to rest before harvesting again. To have forced rhubarb each year, consider growing three or four rhubarb plants and force one each year so the others always have plenty of time to recover.

Don't Get Ahead of Schedule with Growing Transplants

We are well into the seed fever season when gardeners buy or swap for new to them varieties regardless of need or garden space availability; no comment on whether I'm personally afflicted this season. I think its timely to remind gardeners not to start their transplants too early.

A healthy, vigorously growing transplant can mean we're enjoying the veggies of our labor sooner. There is a temptation to try to start earlier and grower larger transplants. I'd like to discourage you from that. When we talk about the size of transplants we're really talking about the age; the longer a transplant grows the bigger it gets. Research has shown that while older/larger transplant reach harvest sooner they don't result in higher

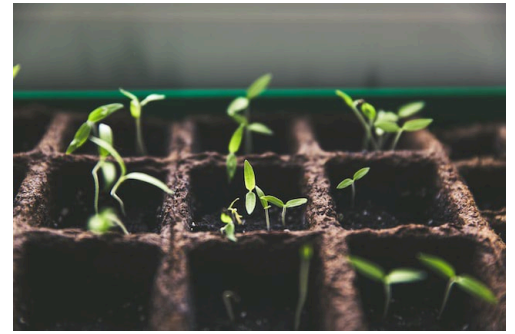


Forced rhubarb nearing harvest on a commercial farm in the [Rhubarb Triangle of Yorkshire](http://www.eoldroyd.co.uk/). Image from <http://www.eoldroyd.co.uk/>

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yields. Younger/smaller transplants perform just as well in terms of yields, but that occurs later simply due to being younger.

The difficulty is that as the transplant gets larger it is more of a challenge to grow in most home environments. The transplant will need a larger container to prevent it from becoming rootbound, more fertilizer, more water and in general more area to grow in. It's not that a home gardener cannot provide all these extras, only that it is more taxing on your resources.



The chart below gives production details for common transplants used in the garden. Keep in mind that for several of these crops they can also be direct seeded into the garden with success, so transplanting is not always a necessity. In our area, the frost free date is around May 10th. For warm season crops we would count backwards from this date to determine when to start transplants.

Vegetable	Approximate growing time (wks)	Germination temperature (F)	Growing Temperature (F)	Conditions for hardening
		<i>Cool Season</i>		
Broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower	5 to 7	70°	60 to 65°	50 to 55° for 10 days
Lettuce	4 to 6	70°	60 to 65°	Reduce temperature and moisture
		<i>Warm Season</i>		
Cucumber and squash	2 to 3	75°	65 to 75°	Reduce moisture
Eggplant	6 to 8	75°	70 to 75°	Reduce moisture
Pepper	7 to 9	75°	70 to 75°	Reduce moisture
Tomato	5 to 7	75°	65 to 75°	Reduce moisture
Watermelon and muskmelon	3 to 5	80-85°	75 to 85°	Reduce moisture

Table 3. Germination, growth and transplant hardening conditions required for home vegetable transplants. from [***THE TENNESSEE VEGETABLE GARDEN - Garden Planning, Plant Preparation and Planting***](#)

For questions about your home and garden please feel free to contact me, Adam Watson, Agriculture Extension Agent watson@utk.edu or by cell 423-430-6711. Emailing or texting pictures is a great way to get questions to me.

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