

January Vegetable Gardening (published 1/11/2025)

By Earl Hockin, Master Gardener

January is a good time to check what seeds you have, and which seeds you need to obtain. Local stores carry the most common varieties of vegetable seeds. If you are interested in some of the less common varieties and plants, you probably need to purchase seeds from seed companies. Some of the suppliers specialize in certain areas and some are superior in customer service. Check out reviews and comments on the internet. Ordering now rather than buying seeds later in the year helps avoid the risk of stores and companies running out of the seeds you might prefer, leaving you to choose a different variety than your first choice.

The last two weeks of January is the time to start many cool season vegetables indoors, including broccoli, cabbage, kale, kohlrabi, cauliflower, onions, collards, chard, celery, many varieties of lettuce, and herbs such as chives, arugula, and parsley. The main advantage to starting your own seeds is that you can grow varieties of your choice, many of which may not be available at local nurseries or big box stores. The second advantage to starting seeds yourselves is that by growing your own transplants, you will spend much less money than the cost of buying transplants commercially. It is also the time start flowers that have a long germination period such as snapdragons and begonias. When starting seeds indoors have them at room temperature and with a source of light. You don't need grow lights, as ordinary lights or a south facing window will be sufficient. Transplant the seedlings outdoors when they have at least two true leaves. It is best if the soil temperature at 4 inches deep has consistently reached 40F. Protect the soil or containers with row cover, which will keep the soil temperature close to four degrees warmer than the air temperature.

If you don't have equipment or space for starting these cool season seeds indoors then you can certainly use the procedure called winter sowing to start seeds outdoors. Winter sowing is done using clear plastic containers such as milk and juice jugs, or the large rectangular containers in which spinach or mixed greens are sold. Put at least 3 to 4 inches of seed starting mix or potting mix in the bottom and plant the seeds at the depth described on the seed package. The container must have drainage holes in the bottom and ventilation holes on the top. When using jugs, you need to cut a circle around about 80% of the jug, creating a hinge which allows you to put the soil and seeds inside, and then to reopen when you remove the plants to transplant. After planting the seeds and before putting the jug outdoors, moisten the soil and put tape around the cut to close the jug. Put the jug or container in which you have placed the seeds outside in a location where they get sun and when it rains water can get inside.

At the end of January or very early in February you can start peas seeds indoors in the kitchen. Put them between a layer of moist paper towels in a plastic bag. When they have started to produce roots and before their stems start to show, which typically will be a day or two on either side of Valentine Day, plant them.

Check out the information at "Winter Sowing of Seeds"

<https://extension.umd.edu/sites/extension.umd.edu/files/2022-01/Winter%20sowing%20talk%202022.pdf>

"How to Try Winter Sowing"

<https://extension.illinois.edu/blogs/over-garden-fence/2024-01-15-how-try-winter-sowing>

"What is Winter Sowing"

https://blogs.anl.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2012/04/Winter-Sowing_Ellen-Meyers_smaller.pdf

For more information about gardening, visit UTHORT's YouTube site for helpful videos:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCjS3d1kIH1OZ1Z2qPvhgfQ>

Or Washington County's YouTube site: <https://www.youtube.com/@utextensionwashingtoncounty>

How do I ask a question?

If you have a question for the Master Gardeners, submit them to us on our website at www.netmga.net. Click the link at the top of the page, "ASK A MASTER GARDENER" to send in your question. Questions that are not answered in this column will receive a response from a Master Gardener to the contact information you provide.

The Master Gardener Program is offered by the University of Tennessee Extension. The purpose of the Master Gardener program is to train people as horticultural-educated volunteers. These volunteers work in partnership with the local Extension office in their counties to expand educational outreach, providing home gardeners with researched-based information.