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AVOID STARTING SEEDS TOO EARLY

By John Farfaglia

Starting your plants from seeds indoors can be fun and rewarding but resist the urge to get going too early. While it might seem tempting to start your tomatoes in February the results will not be good. Seedlings started too early often end up being weak and spindly. The trick is to produce healthy, sturdy transplants that will quickly make the transition to outdoors at the appropriate time.

The easiest way to determine your seed starting schedule is to count back from your typical outdoor planting date or last frost date. For our area, I would suggest using Memorial Day as a target date for tender vegetables and annuals. Since it takes about 6-8 weeks to produce tomato transplants from seed this would put your seed starting date around early April.

Here is the recommended number of weeks between seeding and outdoor planting for a number of other plants.

<u>Plants</u>	<u>Weeks</u>
Tomatoes	6-8
Peppers	8-9
Broccoli, Cabbage, Cauliflower	5-7
Squash, Cucumbers, Melons	3-4
Pumpkins	3-4
Marigold	5-6
Petunia	10
Sunflower	2-3
Zinnia	3-4

For best results use a professional peat based seed starting mix, provide high light conditions and good air circulation. Temperatures that are too warm will result in weak stems.



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PRUNE FRUIT TREES IN WINTER

By John Farfaglia



The best time to prune most fruit trees is in the winter while they are still dormant. One advantage of pruning at this time is you can see the framework of the tree and better determine what needs to be removed. The goal of pruning is to develop a structurally strong tree, with limbs exposed to full sunlight. Proper pruning on young fruit trees decreases the need for corrective pruning in future years.

To find out more about fruit tree pruning, and see illustrations, you may want to pick up a copy of *The Cornell Guide To Fruit Growing* at our office. This 100 page guide covers information on growing and caring for tree fruit and small fruits in the home garden. Also covered is information on strawberries, raspberries, grapes, blueberries, currants, gooseberries, elderberries and more. It is available for \$12.



MYTHS & FACTS: Successful Transplanting of Trees & Shrubs

Submitted by John Farfaglia

MYTH: Trees have deep tap roots.

FACT: Trees rarely have a tap root, rather, their roots spread out horizontally a distance of 2 ½ -3 times greater than the crown spread. Greater than 95% of a tree's roots are in the top three feet of soil, and the important fine feeder roots are in the top six inches.

MYTH: Dig a deep hole to transplant a tree.

FACT: The hole should be no deeper than the height of the root ball, and should be as wide as two or preferable three times the diameter of the root ball.

MYTH: Amend the planting hole with peat moss, sand, or compost.

FACT: As long as original soil has a reasonable texture and structure, it need not be amended. In some cases, adding amendments leads to waterlogged soil that causes anerobic conditions and root death.

MYTH: A professionally installed tree should be staked or guyed.

FACT: Over time, staked or guyed trees reduce the normal taper of a trunk. Trees should be staked only if loose in its root ball, installed in windy conditions, or if planted bare root. Trees should not be staked tightly, and the stakes and wires should be removed as soon as possible, usually after one growing season or one year.

MYTH: Prune out one-third of the crown of a tree to prevent transplant shock.

FACT: Post-transplant pruning does not improve a tree's chances for survival, so remove only diseased, broken, crossing, or misdirected branches.

INSECTS MAY HITCHHIKE INDOORS ON FIREWOOD

Submitted by Paul E. Lehman



As winter winds down toward spring, people who burn wood in their homes often

find themselves playing host to a variety of insects that hitchhiked indoors on firewood.

The most common are long-horned beetles, metallic wood-boring beetles and bark beetles. Spiders, other sorts of beetles, ants and numerous other creatures may also be imported on firewood.

If you bring in only enough wood for a few days' burning, there is ordinarily little or no problem. But if you stockpile wood indoors or if the wood box never gets emptied all the way to the bottom, warm indoor temperatures may accelerate the development of immature insects or bring overwintering adults out of dormancy. The result looks like an insect invasion.

Some of these insects are wood borers that entered the wood when it was a standing tree or after it was cut and piled outside. Indoors, most of them are strictly nuisance pests – they won't reproduce in the house or damage furnishings or structural timber or get into stored food. Even the wood-boring insects just want to get outdoors to complete their life cycle by mating and laying their eggs in the bark of a dead or dying tree.

Some pests that come indoors on firewood can cause problems, however. Carpenter ants, Powderpost beetles and termites that come in on firewood can move into structural timbers or furnishings.

To keep all these pests outdoors, store firewood at a distance from the house – at least 25 feet, but farther is better. Wood stored on the porch is protected and handy, but it parks any insects it contains literally on your doorstep and may offer a haven and an entryway for rodents, also.

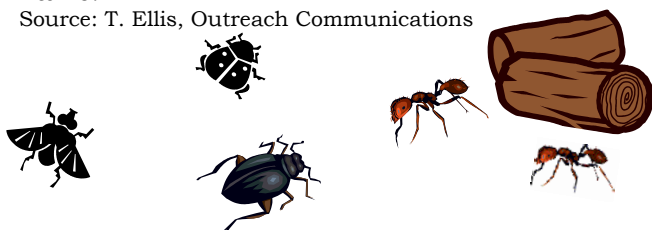
Before taking wood inside, check it for obvious signs of insect activity – tunnels, holes or other borings. Either discard it or burn it immediately.

Bring in only small amounts of wood as needed. Rapid turnover of wood stored in heated buildings is especially important in late winter and early spring – that is when premature insect emergence is most likely.

If insects do turn up inside the house, a flyswatter, a broom and dustpan or a vacuum cleaner is usually the only control necessary.

Before you dispatch these out-of-season invaders, you might take a closer look. Some of the long-horned beetles, for instance, are pretty exotic-looking, with their antennae as long or longer than their bodies. It is easy to see how they got their name.

Source: T. Ellis, Outreach Communications



NON-CHEMICAL CONTROL OF HOUSEPLANT INSECTS

Submitted by John Farfaglia

Many houseplant insect problems can be controlled using non-chemical methods, particularly if the infestation is light.

Washing: Use a soft cotton cloth dipped in mild detergent solution (1/2 teaspoon per quart of lukewarm water) to wipe small numbers of aphids, mealybugs, scales, or mites off plants with smooth leaves. You can also dislodge a light pest infestation with a forceful spray of lukewarm water.

Handpicking: It's easy to remove and dispose of large pests such as cutworms, caterpillars, and millipedes that infest houseplants outdoors in summer. Earthworms can be driven out of the soil by setting the pot in a tub of water to saturate it. You may also remove small numbers of scale insects or mealybugs with a fingernail file or pen knife.

Sticky traps: Sticky traps are flat cards with glue on the surface. Usually colored yellow, they capture insects that land on them. While these traps can reduce the number of flying insect pests, you can not eliminate an insect problem by using just sticky traps. Sticky traps are most useful when used to detect the presence of whiteflies, fungus gnats, winged aphids, and thrips which then alerts you to take additional action.

Pruning: An insect infestation may be confined to a few leaves or branches or may be particularly bad in those locations. Eliminating the worst branches will make it easier to control pests on remaining parts of the plant. If an infestation is truly isolated, pruning may be all the control that's needed.

Give up: When a houseplant is heavily infested and badly damaged, the best course of action is to throw the plant away. Minimize your losses and avoid exposing other plants to the same pest problem. If you are reluctant to discard the plant, prune it practically to the soil. If it

resprouts, watch new growth carefully for signs of infestation.

Houseplants are an important element in most indoor environments. We rely on them to add beauty and interest to our homes as well as to public spaces such as office buildings, restaurants, and theaters. Unfortunately, houseplants may be troubled by insects and related pests.

Sometimes houseplants are infested by pests they pick up during production. No business knowingly sells infested plants, but insects and mites and their eggs are so small they often go unnoticed. Houseplants often become infested when they are set outdoors in summer. Even if plants remain indoors, they may be attacked by tiny pests that move through screens or open windows.

Regardless of how these pests find your houseplants, they are usually manageable, often by non-chemical means – if you are alert to signs of trouble and take steps to control the pests in a timely fashion.

Prevention and Detection: prevention is the first line of defense. Check houseplants before you buy them, and then isolate them from others for two or three weeks to allow undetected problems to become obvious. It is also a good idea to check plants very carefully each fall, regardless of whether they were outdoors for the summer.

Choose plants that will thrive in the amount of light you can provide. A houseplant that is stressed from inadequate light is a more likely candidate for insect problems than one that is growing vigorously, or at least steadily.