

County Agent News  
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### Starting Your Own Transplants

Starting your own transplants can be a fun way to get a jump start on the gardening season. It can also be a way to get transplants of varieties which you would not be able to find in commercially grown transplants. Heirloom tomato varieties are common as home started transplants. There are many tomato varieties which have distinct colors and/or flavors which may produce well in your garden but are not popular enough to be profitably grown as commercial transplants. One of my favorites is Black Krim, this is a dark red almost purple tomato with a black shoulder. I like the distinct flavor which is mild without being bland like some of the commercial, high producing varieties.

You don't need a lot of high dollar equipment for starting your own transplants. I've invested in a few multi celled flats and trays for them but you don't even need those. Some empty milk cartons or a few old cake pans will work. Just make sure you allow for drainage. Overwatering is one of the most common causes of seedling losses. Empty milk cartons with holes punched in the bottoms and set on wood strips in an old baking pan work great.

I've seen special "grow lights", "on sale" for nearly \$200 but a 48 inch two tube fluorescent shop light for as little as \$10 works great. If you have a good window you may get by with natural light for a few plants. I actually prefer starting my plants in the basement with fluorescent lights hanging just an inch or two above the plants. I hang the lights by chains which are easily adjusted as the plants grow. I can control the light, temperature, humidity, and "wind" better in my basement. I get better root development with less top growth in slightly cooler temperatures than I get next to a south facing window. I use a small fan to provide air movement or "wind" to get stronger plant stems. If I start plants too soon I can lower the room temperature a bit to slow plant growth even more if I need to.

Selecting the right planting dates for your plants is important. In this area our last frost date is about May 21. Cabbage plants can tolerate some freezing temperatures and like the cool temperatures of early spring and summer. Cabbages can be transplanted 6 to 8 weeks after emerging and can be transplanted outdoor as early as 6 weeks before the last frost. So I will soon start some cabbage seedlings. Tomatoes, on the other hand, are very sensitive to cold temperatures and frost. Tomatoes need 6 to 10 weeks from emergence to transplanting and should not be transplanted sooner than one week before your last frost date unless you are using a cold frame or some other method of protecting the young plants. Late march or early april are good times to start tomatoes unless you can protect those transplants when you put them out.

For more information about when to start seedlings for transplants give me a call at the Burke County Extension office at 377-2927 or email me at [dan.folske@ndsu.edu](mailto:dan.folske@ndsu.edu)