

Proper Transplant Care Contributes To A Healthy Garden

Gardeners interested in growing a productive garden cannot afford to be lazy when it comes to transplants. According to Larry Bass, extension horticultural specialist at North Carolina State University, strong transplants contribute to a healthy garden.

To improve the health of your transplants, Bass offers these suggestions.

First, sterilize the growing media you use for the transplants. This will prevent the seedlings from being killed by the fungus that causes damping-off disease. You can prepare a good growing mix by combining one part good garden soil, one part shredded peat moss and one part sharp sand. Sterilize the mix by baking it in an oven for approximately one hour at 210 degrees.

Other types of growing media can be bought at local garden centers or from seed and garden supply catalogs, the specialist said.

The most widely available seed-starting medium is vermiculite, which is sterile when purchased. However, Bass warns, seedlings cannot be grown in vermiculite for very long because it contains no nutrients. The seedlings must be given a water-soluble fertilizer regularly or transplanted to sterile soil when

Troubleshooter's Guide To Composting

■ Compost has a bad odor.

Problem: Not enough air. Solution? Turn it.

■ Compost is damp and warm in the middle but nowhere else.

Problem: Pile too small. Solution: Collect more material and mix old ingredients into a new pile.

■ Heap is damp and sweet-smelling but still will not heat up.

Problem: Lack of nitrogen. Solution: Mix in a nitrogen source like fresh manure, bloodmeal, grass clippings.

N.C. Cooperative Extension Service

the second pair of true leaves form.

Concerning containers suitable for transplant growth, Bass said they should be clean, sturdy and fit into the space available for growing plants in the home. All of the containers must have drainage holes to allow the excess water to run off.

Wooden flats and plastic trays are good choices for starting a large number of seedlings in a limited work area. Other popular containers are pots made of compressed peat, disks of pressed peat that swell to pot-like cylinders when soaked in water, and peat cubes.

Some of the simplest containers can be found in the kitchen, such as aluminum foil frozen food trays,

cottage cheese dishes, bottom halves of milk cartons, ice cream

cartons and paper cups.

Once the seeds have germinated, they must have sufficient sunlight. Place them on a sun porch or a window with a southern exposure if possible. If bright sunlight is unavailable, use fluorescent lights.

If you use fluorescent lights, a fixture containing two 40-watt cool white fluorescent tubes spaced three to four inches apart is sufficient. Place the seedlings six to eight inches from the tubes and leave the light on for 14-16 hours a day. As the plants grow, be sure to raise the lights to prevent leaf burn, Bass said.

Water on the basis of touch, and check the pots daily to make sure they are kept moist.

To fertilize the seedlings, use a water-soluble house plant fertilizer such as 20-20-20. The first fertilization should take place a few days after the seedlings have emerged. For the first application, use the fertilizer at half-strength. If the seedlings look yellow, fertilizer is needed, the specialist said.

Before being placed in the garden, the plants should be "hardened-off," a process that toughens the plants to withstand the outside environment. This usually should be done over a two-week period, he said. Harden the plants by setting them outside during the day and bringing them in at night. Be careful not to let them get caught in a frost.

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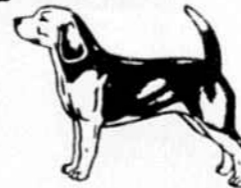


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Milligan Adds Equipment Line

Milligan Power & Lawn Equipment of Shallotte has been added as authorized dealer for a new line of Troy-Bilt law and garden equipment, according to owners Paul and Lynn Milligan.

The new line is backed by a seven-year exclusive warranty which covers the entire Troy-Bilt line, except the Troy-Bilt Roto Tiller Power Composters, which carry a full no-time-limit warranty.



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