I am hopeful this last cold rainy weekend will be the last one, it’s time to get ready to plant. Yes, we needed the rain and I always enjoy it, but it’s time for the soils to warm up, so we can plant.

Hopefully you have added a layer of mulch to your gardening area, and dug it under at least 12 inches. This not only adds nutrients to the soil, but it can help the soil temperature rise. Seeds require different soil temperatures to germinate. When the soil temperature reaches 32 degrees, spinach, onions and parsnip seeds will germinate: 40 degrees radishes, carrots, beets, peas, and cabbage will germinate; 50 degrees asparagus, corn and tomatoes will germinate; and 60 degrees squash, cucumbers, beans, peppers, and melons will germinate. If you do not have a soil thermometer you can purchase a cooking thermometer. One that says rare, medium and well done will not work. Look for numerical or digital one with a low reading of at least 30 degrees, the high reading is insignificant, as we are hoping the soil temperature never reaches 220 degrees. To check the accuracy of a thermometer, place the thermometer tip in a pan of boiling water. The average boiling point of water in the Kingman area is 190 degrees. Most thermometers can be adjusted if necessary.

Unfortunately the outdoor soil temperatures are not warm enough to germinate our favorite vegetables, and fruits. So, why not start them in the house? By the time the soil temperatures are sufficient for growing you will already have established plants.

First
Purchase a good quality potting soil. When purchasing potting soil look for ingredients like; sphagnum peat moss, processed chicken manure, bat guano, vermiculite or perlite, chelated iron, kelp meal, and even time released fertilizer. I am not advocating you buy the most expensive potting soils available, but I do caution you about buying the least expensive. As I mentioned in a previous article “Faux Soils” all potting soil are not created equally. Moisten the soil and bring it in the house for at least 24 hours before planting. This will bring your potting mixture to room temperature for faster germination.
Second
Paper towel or toilet paper tubes make great seed starting containers, as they will biodegrade, and will not disturb tiny roots when you transplant. Cut the paper towel tube in thirds, or use a whole toilet paper tube. Hold the tube in one hand and push the soil into the tube with the other. Pack the soil firmly, and tap it gently until the tube is 90 percent full. Stand the tubes upright in any container i.e.; plastic butter tube, ice cream container, making sure some air can circulate between the tubes.

Third
Get your favorite squash, cucumber, pepper, tomato, or other vegetable seeds and carefully plant one seed in each tube. Place the seed and push it into the soil with a pencil. Read the seed package for the appropriate depth. Water lightly with a diluted, half strength, liquid fertilizer, and place in a window that receives at least four hours of sun daily. Check the tubes daily for moisture. Keep them moist but not saturated. There should not be standing water in the bottom of the container.

Fourth
By the time the outdoor soil temperature is warm enough to accommodate planting you will already have established plants. Get the young plants acclimated by taking them outdoors, placed in partial sun during the day, and bring them back in at night. Do this for two or three days, then the fourth day leave them outside. Then plant them.

Fifth
Prepare your planting area, whether it is in the ground or a larger container, make a hole large enough to accommodate the entire tube, insert the tube until it is completely buried and firmly pack the soil around it. You will probably notice that the tiny roots have already started to grow thru the tube. The tube itself will decompose in the soil, so there is no need to remove it.

This method does not work well for smaller seeds like, carrots, lettuce and radishes. But it does work well on tomatoes, squash, peppers, and melons and other large seeds.

Jump start your planting, buy a package of your favorite seeds, share them or save the extra for next year.

Interested in ponds or water features? Free, open to the public, workshop will be held Saturday, May 9th in Kingman. Call The University of Arizona Mohave County Cooperative Extension for details, 928 753-3788.

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