

## Grow Lights

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Homeowners are forever trying to grow plants inside their homes, especially in winter time. The challenge is to get enough light to the plant. Unless you are in a true greenhouse setting, there just isn't enough light, even in a single bright sunny window, to do more than just maintain a plant. If you are trying to grow something special or especially if you are trying to grow transplants, a window just isn't going to work, you need lights. The best thing to use for a grow light are standard fluorescent lights. You can get 4 foot double bulb fixtures fairly economically and then build a wooden stand to hold the lights. Many years ago I built a very simple frame out of 1 x 4s that held two double bulb 4 foot fixtures. But there's also plans to use PVC pipe. There's a great video on K-State's website with instructions. I used the little chains that came with the light to keep the bulbs as close as possible to the plants. This is very very important to keep the lights close to the plants. Doubling the distance between the lights and the plants doesn't cut the light intensity in half, it cuts it by 3/4. Simply going from 3 inches to 6 inches means the plants are only getting 1/4 the amount of light that they were getting. If you don't have the light close enough, the plants will grow tall trying to reach the light. Keep the light literally right on top of the plants to reduce the excessive growth we often see on young seedlings. As the plants grow you can slowly raise the light fixtures. Of course the other trick is to not start your seedlings too early, but that's a topic for another programs! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

## Keeping Poinsettias Alive

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I'm a firm believer in supporting the greenhouse industry. In my opinion, seasonal plants like poinsettias and Easter Lilies should be bought, enjoyed and then tossed so you can purchase new ones next year! Some people have told me that I'm not a real gardener because of this attitude and if that's the case, so be it. However, if you are one of those folks that enjoy the challenge of keeping the poinsettia alive and getting it to rebloom next year, then here's the steps you need to take for the near term. Continue to keep it away from extreme heat and cold. When the soil is dry down the first half inch, water it. Make sure that excess water can drain out and then throw it away. Wet feet will kill poinsettia's real fast! Many of the newer varieties will hold their color clear into May so don't worry about that. Sometime in late March new side shoots should develop below the colored leaves. Everything above these new shoots can be removed at that time. Between now and then don't go fertilizing the poinsettia plant. You are going to move the plant outside in mid-May, after all danger of frost is past. At that time you can fertilize it and then water it daily. You don't want to fertilize the plant when it's inside because light levels are so low. Fertilizing under low light conditions forces the plant to grow and then it starts reaching up for the light and then you have a 4 foot tall poinsettia that has the stems fall over. We fertilize when it goes outside, but not before. As to how you get the plant to bloom in time for Christmas next year - we'll discuss that in the late summer! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

## Starting Plants from Seed

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I'll be the first to admit that a great way for a gardener to deal with winter, is to start their own transplants from seed. But if you are going to be serious about this you first need to build a light stand. Trying to start transplants on a windowsill will lead you to only frustration. The second thing you need to do is to then develop a calendar so you don't start plants too soon. You can grow very high quality transplants in your house, but it takes a great deal of timing. You need three things to do this. First of all a month by month calendar. Secondly, a chart of the optimal planting time for whatever crops you want to start from seed and finally a chart of how long it takes to get from seed to transplant. You see, things germinate at different temperatures and speed and then you want different size plants for different crops. Vine crops like watermelon or cucumbers takes 4 weeks or less to go from planting to transplanting. Some of the flowers, like vinca or begonias can take 12 weeks or more. So let's take the ever popular tomato. We are going to plant most of our tomatoes the second weekend of May of this year let's say May 11<sup>th</sup>. Tomatoes are going to take six weeks to go from seeding to transplantable size plants. So back up 6 weeks and you are at March 30<sup>th</sup>. Plant your tomato seeds earlier than that and you're going to have a mess. We want to plant cabbage around March 23<sup>rd</sup>. Cabbage takes 8 weeks so seeding time indoors will be January 26<sup>th</sup>. The charts of when to plant and when to seed are both available from the Extension Office, stop by or call!

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