

**Friday's Feature**

By

**Theresa Friday**

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**Sow some seed for fall plants**

Even though it's still hot and humid, August is the time to start thinking about fall planting. Now is the time to begin sowing seeds for fall transplants. By starting now you can have ornamentals such as pansies, petunias, calendulas and snapdragons ready to plant in the garden in early October. If you are a vegetable lover, now is the time to start seeds of broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage and other cool season vegetables.

According to William Adams, a retired Horticulture Agent at Texas A&M, if starting your own transplants has been disastrous for you in the past, especially in the spring, then take heart because starting fall transplants is easier. Since the soil is not as cool as it is in spring, there is not much damping-off disease. Gardeners are able to start the transplants outside where they can get plenty of sunlight. But, it is best if the transplants don't get too much sun - morning sun and afternoon shade make a good combination.



There are many different types of containers that can be used to grow seeds. Even foam coffee cups, discarded by people whenever they take a coffee break, can be used simply by poking three or four holes in the side at the bottom of the cup. If you are reusing containers, be sure to clean and sterilize them prior to planting. Typically, a washing with soap and water followed by a 15 minute soak in a 1:10 dilution of bleach and then a thorough rinse is all that is needed.

In order to ensure success, use a good potting soil mix. Many standard potting soils will work fairly well, or you can make your own. If you decide to make your own, do not include garden soil. Garden soil can harbor weed seed, fungus diseases, insects and nematodes.

Most seeds should be barely covered with the soil mix, but some tiny seeds like lettuce should not be covered at all. Once planted, water them in thoroughly. Allow the containers to drain and then put them in a plastic bag out of sunlight. Within a few days the seedlings will begin to grow. As soon as this happens,

take the containers out of the bags and put them in a well-ventilated area. As the seedlings begin to make growth, use any soluble houseplant fertilizer to keep them growing vigorously.

Before you know it, you'll have a container full of tiny seedlings that can either be transplanted into individual containers, or if there aren't too many in the pot, held until time to go into the garden. Perhaps the simplest technique is just to plant two or three seeds in each pot, thinning them to one plant after a few weeks.

If you opt for transplanting, be sure that you handle the young seedling only by the leaves. If you grasp the stem and damage it to any extent, the young seedling will be stunted. Pots for transplants should be filled to within 1/4 inch of the rim. A pencil can be used to make a hole in the center of the potting soil mixture. This is where a little moisture is critical; dry soil won't allow the hole to stay open. Carefully lower the seedling roots into the hole and then use the pencil again in a lever-like action to firm the soil against the root system. Be sure to water the plants carefully, picking up any that get knocked into the soil.

So peruse the seed catalogs and see what's new. Just be sure to know which flowers and vegetables are recommended for fall planting. For recommendations of cool-season annuals and vegetables for Florida, review the University of Florida online publications at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/VH021> and <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/MG319>.

Theresa Friday is the Residential Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names, if used in this article, is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others.

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