3 Ways to Jump-start Spring

3 WAYS TO JUMP-START SPRING

LIVE WELL UTAH

It’s not quite springtime, but that doesn’t have to stop you from getting things growing. Here are three ideas to get an early start on spring that we shared last week on Studio 5. Watch the video, or read on for highlights.

Starting Seeds

Start thinking about your vegetable garden, and start your own plants from seed.

Materials Needed

To start your own seeds you'll just need a few basic supplies:

- **Seeds:** If you plan well enough in advance, you can order seeds from a catalog and find unusual plant varieties, or you can pick up seed packets at your local garden center or nursery.
- **Containers:** You can find trays and containers at your local garden center, or you can use small plastic containers from your recycle bin. Egg cartons work really well– you can cut off the lid and use it as a tray to catch drainage water. If you do use recycled containers, be sure to poke holes in the bottom for drainage, and sanitize them before using.

- **Soil:** Use soil mix specifically for starting seeds, and do not reuse soil from other plants or take soil from your yard.
- **Light Source:** Young seedlings need a lot of light as soon as they emerge, even more than a sunny window can offer. You can buy a lighting setup, or build your own (see instructions here).
- **Fertilizer:** Find a fertilizer specifically for seedlings or vegetable plants. Mix as directed on the package, and begin using once seedling has emerged.

Caring for Seedlings

Most indoor air temperatures will be perfect for seedlings—between 60-80 degrees. Just after planting seeds, dampen the soil using a spray bottle. You don't want to water log the seeds or seedlings, but you don't want them to dry out at any point during the germination process. Continue to keep them moist with a spray bottle until they germinate and emerge.

Cover trays or containers with plastic wrap or a plastic bag until the seedling emerges, then begin watering with a plant production fertilizer for optimal results. You'll also want to start using your grow light once the seed has sprouted. Keep the light 2-4 inches above the plants as they grow. Run your grow light for 12 to 14 hours a day, and give your seedlings a break at night.

Transplanting

It takes about a week for seeds to germinate and sprout, and the seedlings need an additional 4-6 weeks before they can be transplanted into the garden, depending on the plant type. Mid March is a good time to start seeds indoors, but check with your local Extension office to find out exactly when you should start your seeds and transplant your seedlings into the garden, as it varies year to year depending on the previous

year’s frost date.

If you take your seedlings directly from their cozy indoor setup to the garden, they won’t survive. You have to harden off your plants; a process that takes about two weeks. This means gradually getting them used to being outside. Start with an hour in the afternoon, gradually working up to a full 24 hours. Then your plants are ready to be transplanted into the garden!

Find out More

View our seed starting fact sheet, Wasatch Front vegetable planting guide, detailed seed starting video, visit garden.usu.edu for more information on gardening, or attend the Seed Starting Workshop on February 22 at USU Botanical Center (registration required).

Easter Wheat Grass

Sprout wheat grass this year for fun springtime decor. This makes lovely table decor, and is a fun activity to do with children.

Materials Needed:

- Wheat berries
- Potting Soil
- Festive containers (pots, baskets, bowls, etc.)
- Spray bottle
- Plastic wrap or bags

Soak wheat berries overnight so they begin to sprout. Prepare containers by adding soil. If using an Easter basket, line with plastic wrap before adding soil. Spread a thick layer of sprouted wheat in your container of soil (any potting soil will do, you can even wet the soil before adding the wheat). Spray with water so that everything is saturated evenly. Cover container with plastic wrap or place it in a large plastic bag, to keep the wheat berries moist and encourage growth. Move containers to a sunny window, and spray with water a few times daily. Don’t let them dry out! Once the grass has begun to grow, you can remove the plastic and continue watering regularly. Grass should grow 6-10 inches in two weeks.

Forced Branches

You can urge those spring blossoms out a little early by bringing budding branches inside. Willows and Forsythia are probably the most common branches to force inside, but you can also try dogwood, cherry, lilacs, or serviceberry branches. Be careful when pruning that you aren’t ruining the shape of your bush or tree. Choose long and thin branches with well-formed buds on them, and cut near a junction. Bring them inside and put them in a vase of lukewarm water, out of direct sunlight (a cool basement room works well). Keep an eye on the water level, and add more as needed.