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Garden Talk: Transplants or Seeds?

When you read the back of a seed packet, sometimes the directions will say to sow seeds directly into the soil. Other times it says you can start them indoors and transplant later. But why does it matter which option you choose?

The main reason is to extend the growing season. If warm season crops like tomatoes and peppers cannot germinate in colder weather, they will not start sprouting and growing until May. But if you start them inside where it is warm, they can get a head start on growing, hopefully lending to more produce.

While it might seem like a good idea to start everything inside, some plants simply do not thrive when transplanted. These plants tend to have delicate root systems that cannot survive disturbances. Beans and peas are common victims of this transplant shock. Another issue is that root vegetables can lose their fibrous taproot during transplanting, and while the plant may survive, the main harvest is lost.

Other plants germinate so quickly that there is not always a need to start them inside. For example, lettuce can germinate in the warm temperatures of late spring and early summer within a few days. Conversely, if you are planting in the early spring, you may want to use transplants, as lettuce can take up to two weeks to germinate in colder temperatures.

As we enter spring, take a moment to research and determine which of your plants can be started inside, and which will do better directly sown into the soil to maximize your garden's productivity this year.