

Paper Napkin Gardening

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Last month I asked you to start looking at catalogs and planning your garden for this spring. It's still too early to plant seeds outside, but you can make seed tapes and mats now to make planting easier in May.

If you don't already have your seeds, get some! Lettuce and zinnias are really easy to grow and you can get the seeds at garden centers, hardware stores, discount department stores and even some grocery stores. Besides the seeds, all you'll need is cheap paper like napkins, paper towels or toilet tissue, and some white glue, the kind you use for school. I like using paper napkins because they're already folded into quarters and unfolded they're about 12 inches square. The fold lines tell you exactly where the middle is and if you're growing cabbage or cucumbers or anything else that needs 12 inch spacing, the middle is where you need to glue your seeds. That's right, put a couple of dots of glue in the middle there and drop on a couple of seeds. Your seeds need different spacing? For lettuce or parsley you glue a seed or two in the center of each *quarter* of the napkin. For carrots or radishes, you'll need to do some additional folding so there are 16 sections in your napkin instead of just four. Take your pre-folded napkin and fold it in half, then unfold it and fold it in half in the other direction. When you unfold the napkin completely you'll have 16 sections! Look at the seed packages and see how far apart it says to plant the seeds and then figure out how many you can plant on one napkin. Remember that not every seed germinates, so be sure to glue 2-3 in every section; you can thin them out later.

This method works great for edging, too. That's when you want a long strip of flowers along the edge of a garden. Take a length of toilet tissue, roll or fold it up and cut it in half *across* the perforated lines. Now you should have two long narrow strips to glue seeds to. The tissue is about four inches across, so determine your spacing based on that. For example, short varieties of zinnia like "Thumbelina" or "Peter Pan" need to be planted 6-8 inches apart, so you'll need to glue seeds in the center of every other square of toilet tissue.

When it comes time to plant the seeds, just rake away your soil to the correct depth (check the package), place your seed tapes or napkins in place, smooth the soil back over, and water. The paper and glue are water-soluble so they decompose quickly and your seeds should sprout on schedule. If you glued more than one seed in each section and they all germinated, you'll need to thin them out. Plants don't grow well if they're crowded, so keep the biggest sprout in each cluster and pinch away or cut off the rest.

The April Kid's Corner will be the last until next fall, so I'll have some outdoor activities for you to try during the summer. If you really like gardening, you might be interested in forming a Junior Master Gardener group. For more information, check out the web site jmgkids.com or call the Dakota County Master Gardener office at (651) 480-7727.

Seed spacing for paper napkin gardening.

