

## Caring for your Transplants

It is important that while we take all steps to raise hardy and healthy transplants, these plants are greenhouse raised and are still very tender. You should introduce them to outdoor conditions gradually to “harden” them off. And remember that tomatoes and peppers are tropical plants and do not like cold temperatures, so if the outdoor temperatures are below 60 degrees F, don’t set them out.

Place plants in a sheltered, shady spot outdoors. Under a tree or even on your back porch is fine. Leave them for 1st day for 30 minutes, 2nd day for 1 hour, increase the time by an hour each day until they are used to getting 6 hours or so a day of sunlight. As you increase the time also gradually expose them to more direct sunlight. Do not over-water. Let plants dry out, but not wilt. Bring plants back indoors each night. After 7 days, the plants should be able to handle sun all day and stay out at night, as long as night time temperatures stay around 50 degrees F. After 7 -10 days your plants are ready to transplant. Try to do so on a cloudy day and be sure to water well after planting.

Peppers and tomatoes prefer well-drained moderately fertile soil that is high in organic matter. Tomatoes can be planted deeply. Strip off any leaves and bury the plant so that about 4 inches of stem remains above the soil line. Roots will develop along the buried stem. Peppers and eggplants are more particular and will do best when planted at the same depth as the pot. They will not form roots along any buried stem and you risk stressing the plants unnecessarily.

The last frost date in Brown County is June 6th and the growing season averages 110 days. While it might be tempting to get those plants out as soon as possible you should definitely wait until soil temperatures are above 60-65 degrees F before planting. If the soil temperatures are too cold, your transplants will just hunker down and not grow anyway, and are more susceptible to shock and disease. Even after they are established peppers can be temperamental about temperature, and will not set fruit if temperatures are too hot or too cool. Nighttime temperatures below 60 degrees F or above 75 degrees F can reduce fruit set.

## About the Grant

Last year’s sale allowed 9 students to travel to scientific meetings and to buy supplies to conduct independent research projects and supported visits to campus by several scientists. The fund also provides support for an intern.