Blooming in Brooklin *By Ken Brown*

Basement garden delights

Starting most of the garden from seed is one activity that keeps my gardener's soul alive and well through winter's cold dark days. How do I know when to plant what?

For instance, in the basement under the lights, with their soil being gently heated to about 26o C, tiny specks of green are begonia seeds germinating.

Every year I marvel at how glorious summer flowers are propagated from little specks of brown dust. A small seed flat is filled with a soil-less mix. The last 0.5 cm is run through a fine sieve to create a smooth surface on which I attempt to evenly spread out a hundred or so little seeds. The packet I saved from last summer will have a couple of thousand and one secret of success is to find a way to evenly sow just a small portion of them.

Searching for specks
A few days later I use a magnifying glass to look for the first specks of green and they reliably appear. Begonias are actually easy to grow, but it takes a few months to get them large enough to move to planters in

the spring. After the begonias, the onion seeds started in mid February seem gigantic by comparison. You can separate and sow them individually.

Seed packets are a wealth of information while catalogues provide even more. Planting out time is the place to start and there are three dates I work with. The first is for cool weather crops and is described with phrases such as, "as soon as the soil can be worked." That's usually in mid April. The second date is in mid May when the soil is warm. Finally, the third is when all danger of frost is past - a tricky thing to estimate - but I work with the first week of June.

Seed packet info
Seed packets will provide a date and the number of weeks the seeds need to be planted in advance of the plant out dates. That's between four and eight weeks, depending on the variety. Working with data about plant out dates and weeks previous, I'm able to sort my seed packets into piles by sowing date. Then each week, in my little basement garden, I pick up the appropri-

ate pile of seeds and sow them. It's all quite simple and handling and reading the seed packets is a great way to spend a winter's day.

What new and exciting things am I looking forward to this year? From the All American selections list, I like a new compact Marigold Super Hero Spry. My young grandsons might take an interest because they love anything Super Hero. It's a French marigold with a ring of dark maroon lower petals and a tuft of golden yellow petals on top. It's earlier to bloom and requires no dead-heading during the summer.

A new veggie
Of course I must have a new vegetable to try and Asian Delight Pak Choi is the one that has me excited this year. Pak Choi is a wonderful cool season vegetable. The new variety has overcome one of its problems; it doesn't bolt and go to seed, staying harvestable in the garden for several weeks after the older varieties are a mass of yellow flowers.

So, with seedlings in the basement and new varieties to anticipate, a gardener can be happy on winter days when the skiing isn't perfect.

Durham Environmental Committee To Honour Achievement

The Durham Environmental Advisory Committee (DEAC) is now accepting nominations for the 2018 Environmental Achievement Awards.

The annual awards program provides an opportunity to recognize individuals and organizations that dedicate time to promote, preserve and enhance the region's natural environment. Past nominees include local residents and businesses that have demonstrated measures undertaken to protect the environment and make Durham Region a healthier and better place to live.

Nomination forms are currently available by contacting **deac@ durham.ca.** The deadline for submissions is March 2.

The DEAC Environmental Achievement Awards was established in 2003 to recognize and acknowledge environmental achievements of individuals and organizations in the public, private and non-profit sectors within Durham Region. The awards program has six categories, which were named in memory of past environmental leaders.