



** This news release from K-State Research and Extension is available online at <https://ksre-learn.com/gardening-winter-chores>

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Despite winter's chill, gardeners can still prep for spring

Storing potatoes, testing old seed make December's to-do list

By Pat Melgares, K-State Research and Extension news service

MANHATTAN, Kan. – Gardeners who may be getting antsy for spring can still find plenty to do during winter's colder months, says Kansas State University horticulture expert Cynthia Domenghini.

For starters, she says, it's a good time to check in on the conditions in which potatoes are being stored.

"Ideally, potatoes should be stored in a cool garage or basement where the relative humidity is 90% and the temperature is between 40-45 degrees Fahrenheit," Domenghini said.

Potatoes can be stored for long periods of time if the temperature remains below 40 F, but Domenghini notes that the starches begin converting to sugars, which alters the flavor of potatoes.

"If this happens in your storage area, keep the potatoes at room temperature for 2-3 days prior to consuming and the desired flavor should return," she said.

If stored above 45 F for prolonged periods of time, potatoes will begin to sprout. If the relative humidity is too low, potatoes will become soft and shriveled. Domenghini said storing potatoes in perforated plastic bags will help to maintain higher humidity levels.

Domenghini also notes that winter is a good time to test whether old garden seed is still viable for the spring garden.

"Seed typically remains viable for about three years if kept in cool, dark, dry conditions, though there are exceptions," Domenghini said. "For example, members of the carrot family (carrots, parsnips and parsley) have short-lived seeds that are usually good for only 1-2 years."

A publication from the Colorado State University extension service, [Storing Vegetable and Flower Seeds](#), has more detailed information about the longevity of specific species.

If unsure about your seed's viability, here's how to test it this winter:

- Place 10 seeds on a paper towel moistened with warm water. Cover with a second moistened towel.
- Roll up the towels and place them inside a plastic bag with several holes. Keep the bag in a warm location, such as the top of the refrigerator.
- Remoisten the towels with warm water, as needed.
- After one week, check for germination. Remove sprouted seeds and check again after another week.

"The percentage of seeds that sprout indicates the germination rate," Domenghini said. "You can decide if this rate is acceptable, or if purchasing new seed is warranted."

Domenghini and her colleagues in K-State's Department of Horticulture and Natural Resources produce a [weekly Horticulture Newsletter](#) with tips for maintaining home landscapes and gardens.

Interested persons can subscribe to the newsletter, as well as send their garden and yard-related questions to hortsupport@ksu.edu, or contact your [local K-State Research and Extension office](#).

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Sidebar: Question of the Week

As I plan my garden for next year, I would like to know if there is a tomato variety that produces fewer seeds. I use most of my crop to make salsa, and I'd like to minimize the number of seeds.

Any tomato variety can be used to make salsa, but for those who prefer thick salsa with as few seeds as possible, the 'paste' varieties – such as Roma – are the recommendation.

Slicing varieties of tomatoes will produce a more watery salsa, which may still have great flavor, but will also typically have more seeds.

-- Cynthia Domenghini, K-State horticulture expert, Cdom@ksu.edu

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FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS: Links used in this story
Storing Vegetable and Flower Seeds (Colorado State University),
<https://extension.colostate.edu/topic-areas/yard-garden/storing-vegetable-and-flower-seeds-7-221/>

K-State Horticulture Newsletter, <https://hnr.k-state.edu/extension/info-center/newsletters/index.html>

K-State Research and Extension local offices, <https://www.ksre.k-state.edu/about/statewide-locations.html>

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Story by

Pat Melgares

melgares@ksu.edu

For more information:

Cynthia Domenghini

Cdom@ksu.edu