It is quite interesting to see all the different kinds of products advertised on television during the holiday season. One that particularly caught my attention was about growing your own herb garden indoors. According to the ad, all you had to do was sprinkle the herb seeds on the special sponge, water regularly and soon you would be harvesting all the basil, chives and parsley you can use. There is just one little problem. The ad never mentioned light. Now it is no big deal to germinate seeds indoors. I have germinated grass seed on a wet brick in my office. The trick is to get the plants to continue to grow well after the seeds have germinated and that is where light makes a pretty big difference.
The Light Stuff

If you can put the magic herb garden pots in a south-facing kitchen window they may do alright, but the point to remember is that most herbs require about six hours of direct sun each day. If the pots are on the windowsill, it is important to rotate them every few days to make sure all sides of the plant get enough light for even growth. While less than six hours of direct sunlight won’t kill the herbs, the growth will be thin and leggy. The leaves may be smaller than normal and the aroma and essential oil content will be reduced. The bottom line is that without adequate light, the magic herb garden will be a big disappointment.

The answer to this problem is to use supplemental lighting. A light fixture with two 40 watt, cool white fluorescent bulbs over the herb pots will work, but the light needs to be about 12 inches above the herbs and left on for 14 to 16 hours a day. It is best to have the light fixture on chains so it can be raised as the plants grow. A simple timer that can turn the lights on and off is also recommended.

If you don’t have an interest in the indoor herb garden, you may want to consider growing your own vegetable transplants from seeds. The same light fixture we discussed earlier is adequate, but needs to be much closer to the seedlings. A distance of two inches between the lights and the seedlings is recommended. The light fixture is raised as the seedlings grow trying to keep the two-inch spacing.

Another recommendation for starting your vegetable transplants indoors is to not start too early. Tomatoes for example take about six weeks from germination to get a suitable transplant that is ready to go into the garden. That means that sowing the tomato seeds around the first of March will get you in the garden around the middle of April. If you sow your seeds earlier than the first of March and we have a late spring, the seedlings may get too long and leggy before you can set them out.

If you have any questions about growing plants indoors or other gardening topics, please give me or Chris a call.
January Garden Tips

Review your garden journal from last year and lay out this year’s garden design. Order plants and seeds, keeping an eye toward crop rotation to help prevent disease.

If your houseplants are on a windowsill, keep the leaves away from the glass, especially when the weather is very cold. The glass will conduct the cold and may burn tender leaves. Draw the drapes or shades at night for more protection.

Check the condition of stored bulbs and tubers of dahlias, tuberous begonias, caladiums and callas. Bulbs stored in warm, humid conditions are prone to rot. Discard any bulbs that feel soft or rotten.

When the weather turns frigid, remember the wildlife. Fresh, free-flowing water is essential to all animals, so keep birdbaths ice-free and filled up. Prevent ice from completely covering the surface of your water garden by floating a tennis or other soft rubber ball in the water.

Winter annual weeds may rear their ugly heads in your lawn and garden this time of year. Hand pulling or raking is the most effective method of removal right now. Resist the temptation to spray with herbicides unless temperatures turn mild for a few days (Above 50 degrees). Sprays just won’t work when it’s too cold. Remember to read and follow all label directions.

Group clean, insect-free houseplants together to increase humidity during these dry winter months. Mist the group periodically to further enhance air moisture.

Sow seeds of cool-weather vegetables (broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, collards, lettuce, onions and spinach) in containers for transplanting into the garden in March. Outdoors, sow edible-pod peas and garden peas beginning this month. Continue to plant asparagus.

Toward the end of this month, apply a dormant horticultural oil to roses. Do this before bud-break to smother over-wintering insects and their eggs. Read the label carefully for instructions on use.
Heavenly bamboo

Old fashioned? Well, maybe, if by ‘old fashioned’ you mean indestructible and extraordinarily fruitful. *Nandina domestica*, grown in Chinese and Japanese gardens for centuries, was brought to Western gardens by William Kerr, who sent it to London in his first consignment from Canton, in 1804.

With much to offer, Heavenly Bamboo remains a standout in the contemporary, easy-care garden. Expect soft, evergreen foliage that emerges red, matures to deep green, then turns again to shades of red and purple in winter. White flowers in summer turn to cascades of brilliant scarlet berries that hold their color throughout winter and well into spring. Planted in sun or shade, Heavenly Bamboo is resistant to drought, deer and rabbits.

In February, cut the tallest canes to the ground to keep *Nandina domestica* full and fruitful. For more information click the link below: