



Winter Exercises

in West Michigan

Centerpieces for the Season

Growing an Indoor Herb Garden

i

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IN WEST MICHIGAN

WINTER 2007

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A Toast to Hot Cocoa

Ready or not, the grocery store will soon showcase hot cocoa and mini marshmallows in aisle one. You'll see signs that say "Firewood for Sale!" on the corner of residential streets. The lake will begin to freeze over, ice skaters will want to come out and play and you'll open the door to your office wearing wool mittens—winter is surely here.

Although the idea of ice scrapers and heating bills is not pleasant, this issue of *I Magazine* will hopefully help you out of the winter blues and into the comfort of West Michigan's winter season. You'll find tips on places to go for great outdoor exercise, hearty soup recipes from Whole Foods and a guide to growing an indoor winter herb garden. Flipping through the pages of *I Magazine*, while sitting by the fire, is a perfect way to celebrate the season.

Not only will this issue inspire you to make the best of winter, you'll also meet a number of women in your local community who are making a difference. In this issue, we're continuing to honor the women *I Magazine* nominated as "50 Women of Influence" in West Michigan. Photos and profiles of these women let you see firsthand who the nominees are and why they are influential in your community.

This issue we're introducing a new segment called I Profile. I Profile, which will be featured in each edition, will let you meet a successful businesswoman working in West Michigan. You'll learn about her on a personal level as well as hear about her hardships and achievements as a local woman in business. Veronica Bosgraaf, owner of Pure Bar in Holland, is this issue's I Profile.

As we embark on another winter season, we want *I Magazine* to be an avenue for you to voice what's going on in your community that affects you, as a woman. We want to hear about the stories you've enjoyed reading and new stories you hope to share.

Email your thoughts to erin.lhotta@hollandsentinel.com and don't forget to stock up on hot cocoa and mini marshmallows this winter.

Enjoy this issue of *i*

Erin L'Hotta
Editor

i how to

MORE THAN JUST A HOBBY: Starting seeds at home is healthy and economical

by Teresa Heinz House

At the beginning of each year, while the snow still covers our lawns, our mailboxes are usually filled with gardening catalogues. The bright photos of robust vegetables and flowers come at a time when many people look forward to sunshine and gardening.

Backyard vegetable gardening allows people to enjoy fresh, and often organically grown, food while also saving money. It takes a little planning, but you can easily grow vegetables from seeds indoors before transferring them outdoors in the spring.

George C. Ball, Jr., owner of the W. Atlee Burpee Company, a mail order seed and plant company, said that his company's sales of herb and vegetable seeds and plants in 2008 are up 40 percent over 2007 figures.

"Food prices have spiked because of fuel prices and they redounded to the benefit of the garden," Ball said. "People are driving less, taking fewer vacations, so there is more time to garden."

Starting seeds indoors has more than just money-saving benefits. Starting seeds indoors also gives slow-growing vegetables extra growing time so they will harvest faster in the garden. Growing plants from seeds also allows people to grow unusual plant varieties otherwise unavailable in stores.



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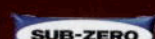
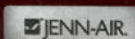


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In addition to Burpees, the Holland area has excellent nurseries and grocers that sell quality vegetable and herb seeds year-round. However, be sure to plan early because some plants need to germinate as early as eight weeks before the last frost. Work backward from the last frost date, which is around mid-May for southwest Michigan.

GETTING STARTED: SEED CONTAINERS AND SOIL

To get started, you will need a seed-sprouting container and soil.

For a seed container, you can use items ranging from a household cup to specially designed germination trays. The germination trays can be purchased at area nurseries and the garden section of home improvement stores.

The seed containers should have drainage holes. Before planting, sterilize the seed containers by washing them in warm soapy water. Sterilizing will prevent diseases that can harm or kill young seedlings.

Instead of using ordinary garden or potting soil, which can be heavy and contain diseases, use seed-starting soil. Seed-starting soil is usually made of perlite, vermiculite, or peat, or a combination of all three.

Some gardeners also use ready-made pellets in which seeds can be pressed. Because the pellets can be planted directly into the garden, they minimize root disturbance during planting.

THE ESSENTIALS OF WATER, WARMTH, AND LIGHT

Once you have a seed-starting container, you need water, warmth, and light. Read the seed packet information for how to sow each seed type. Once you sow the seeds in the seed-starting soil, water the seeds. Many


seed-starting containers have a water tray so you can water them from the bottom. This allows the soil, and later on, young plants to draw up the water as needed. The seeds and seedlings should never be allowed to dry out.

Let the soil dry out slightly on the top before watering again. Be careful not to over-water because overly wet soil promotes diseases. Turn the seedlings daily to keep their stems strong.

Most seeds need warm soil (65 to 75 degrees F) to germinate. Choose a spot that is consistently warm in your home. Some seed-starting containers include plastic covers that can be placed over the tray to preserve moisture.

Ideally, seedlings should be placed in a sunny spot with northern exposure. If you lack adequate light, you can use a plant grow light. Try using a compact fluorescent (CFL) plant bulb, which can be purchased at home improvement stores. CFL lights are more expensive, but they should last for years. You can put your lamp on a timer to turn on at night so that the plants get light all day long.

Discard the weak or spindliest seedlings. Before planting your garden, "harden" the young plants by placing your containers outside in direct sunlight for three days. Increase their time outside by several hours each day until the plants are strong enough to be transplanted. Be sure to plant in good quality garden soil in a sunny location, and fertilize and water as recommended.

Depending on the type of plants, you should be able to enjoy fresh food within a few months. For more information on seed starting, the Organic Gardening website offers a helpful guide with a printable seed starting chart: www.organicgardening.com. 

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