



# *Hidden Ponderings*

*your monthly gardening newsletter from  
Hidden Ponds Nursery*

"The glory of gardening: hands in the dirt, head in the sun, heart with nature. To nurture a garden is to feed, not just the body, but also the soul."  
*Alfred Austin*

## Welcome to our new monthly newsletter, Hidden Ponderings



Every month we look forward to bringing you new and interesting articles, thoughts, pictures and information about southern gardening! We will share tips on seasonal planting, how to handle bugs and other pests, best dirt and their differences, fertilizers - natural and otherwise, landscape architecture - and all other types of information. We encourage you to send your questions and tell us topics you would like to learn more about. Our newsletter will also tell you about classes, seminars, events, and parties we will hold throughout the year. So... keep an eye out, read about what is going on at Hidden Ponds Nursery. Visit us on our website, [www.hiddenpondsnursery.com](http://www.hiddenpondsnursery.com) and follow us on Facebook. But more importantly - COME VISIT US at Hidden Ponds Nursery ! No traffic, lots of parking, great plants, trees and gardening products, and...a lovely spot to wander and ponder! [article copy here](#). Be sure to make the articles short and concise as people tend not to read much more than a couple of paragraphs. Place article copy here.

## Jump Start on Spring !

Now that the holidays are over, it is time to start thinking Spring!!

Cold frames (or hotbeds) are simple structures that have two main purposes. They act like miniature greenhouses to trap radiant heat and to provide protection and insulation from the elements. They can be very elaborate, or very simple, depending on the expertise of the builder, and what you have on hand, or are willing to pay for materials. You can even purchase a pre-made one.



Simple or elaborate, there are a few key basics that you need to follow. First thing to

consider is the location. Ideally it should be south facing to collect the warmth of the sun. A west facing direction would be second best. When we say facing a certain direction, the sloped front should face south (or west). The sloping will give you better sun exposure, but it is not so critical that all is lost if you do not have it.



Most cold frames are a simple rectangular wooden box, about 2-3 ft high that sits on the soil surface. If you have access to straw bales, maybe something left over from the fall holidays, you can use them too. That would look something like this.

Other materials to consider are brick, masonry, cinder, and concrete blocks. Use your imagination! If you really want to get fancy, foam-board insulation panels can be used inside the frame on the above-ground, north-facing side for even more insulation.

Good drainage is essential for the plants, especially if you are planting directly in the ground and plan on moving the cold frame later. If you are using this to harden off or start seedlings in containers, just make sure that the containers can drain. An accessible water supply is also very important. The top covering will prevent rain from watering your plants, so that must be done manually.

Okay, you have decided what you want to use to build the walls. Before you begin building, you need to decide what the top will be made out of. Many different materials, both recycled and new, can be used for the lid of the frame. These include such options as glass, fiberglass, or polyethylene film. Double glazed windows are a good choice. They are durable and are heavier than other materials. Glass is generally looked upon as the best material to cover a cold frame. Other materials include discarded storm windows from screen doors or no longer needed patio doors. If polyethylene plastic is used, the film should be clear and at least 6ml thick. Consider using a double layer for extra insulation. The polyethylene is not very durable and will probably have to be replaced each year.

## Remember - measure twice, cut once!

There are some pros and cons to the different materials used for the top:

If you use glass:

PROS:

- Recycled windows can be used.
  - Good light transmission.
  - Good insulation value.
- More hail-proof (weatherproof) than polyethylene.

CONS:

- Glass is heavy. The extra weight means the frame must be able to support it.
  - It also makes opening and closing the lid more difficult.
  - Broken glass is more difficult to replace and repair.
    - Expensive to purchase new.

If you use plastic:

PROS:

- Inexpensive to purchase.
- Easy to install and lightweight to handle.

#### CONS:

- Probably will need to be replaced each year
- Won't withstand large hail stones, heavy snow, ice loads or errant twigs.
  - Must be secured so that it doesn't take off in a strong wind.

There are other materials that can be used, each one will have its pros and cons. We'll leave building tips to the pros! We will just stick with gardening tips for the cold frames:

Start with spring cool weather vegetables - Lettuce, Onions, Spinach, Radishes, etc. - up to 45 days before you experience your last frost. Remember, our last frost is March 15th! You can also use a deep cold frame in the Fall if you wish to extend the growing season of the same vegetables.

While excellent for starting your spring vegetables, a cold frame is NOT the best place to start warm-weather vegetables such as Tomato or Pepper plants. The average temperature may not be consistently warm enough to germinate those seeds. What you can do is, long before Spring arrives, start the plants indoors under grow lights, and then move them out to the cold frame to help harden them off. This eliminates a lot of the transplant shock.

Just a final note, even in the middle of a southern winter, there will be very sunny days. The temperature in your box, under glass, could get very hot. If you are doing the cool season crops, Lettuce, Cabbage and such, they will not be happy. Whatever type of covering you decide on needs to be hinged in some fashion. That way when the temperature gets too hot, you can prop it open, like this.

Remember to take into account wind speed and direction. You don't want the lid flying off or the interior temperature to cool down too fast. This prop job is extreme, sometimes only a couple of inches will suffice.



We wish all of you the best of luck this growing season. May your lettuce produce large leaves and your zucchini produce an abundant crop!

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