

Living in the moment is a goal worth pursuing in many ways. If we cannot appreciate each day as it comes, and instead, always look for something better, newer, or more satisfying, we find it hard to take pleasure in the ordinary routines that make up most of our lives.

However, living in the moment isn't always useful, either. Right now, here in our part of the world, the ground is frozen hard, though we have little snow left. The temperature has been near zero during the past several mornings, and spring doesn't really seem all that imminent.

For those of us who grow most of our own food, though, now is the time to focus on the months ahead, not on this cold March day. On our west windowsill, tucked in between the large clay pots of oregano and rosemary, are four little containers filled with the beginnings of ingredients for next winter's onion soup and other dishes. There are small yellow onion plants of two varieties—Clear Dawn and Dakota Tears, one box of Rossa Lunge de Tropea red onions, and one of Siegfried Frost leeks. These little seedlings are the beginning of this year's garden.

This evening, we assembled our plant stand, too. It goes up each March to occupy a corner of the basement. Lights above the shelves make it a warm place for starting vegetable and garden seeds. The fluorescent tubes work as "grow lights," as well. Later on, when all the seedlings are moved to the garden or unheated greenhouse, we take down the stand and store the pieces along the wall next to the sauna. There are five shelves on the stand, and they hold all the trays of seedlings we need for this year's garden.

Last fall, we mixed our own seed starting mix. It has waited out the winter in a galvanized wash tub in the wood shed. Now, we have brought the tub into the warm basement, and we will soon transfer the mixture, a little at a time, into trays to start seeds of tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, herbs, and flowers. We will soon plant other cold-hardy seeds in the greenhouse—spinach, lettuce, other greens, and more onions and leeks.

Later on, when these small plants need transplanting, we will bring up another soil mixture that has spent the winter frozen in the greenhouse. The little tomatoes and peppers can then be put into larger pots with plenty of soil for good growth. A few weeks in the greenhouse, warmed by the spring sun, will make them strong and healthy and ready to meet the season in the open garden.

So, while we try—and usually succeed—in enjoying our lives as they happen, day by day if not actually moment by moment, we also must think ahead. This is necessary and useful for most of us, and for those of us whose work is on farms and gardens, it is crucial. Adequate and nutritious food for us and feed for our livestock depend not only on our work during the present season, but also on our adequately anticipating what we need to do during the months ahead.