**Lessons to grow with by Suzy Hancock of Portland Nursery**

*There are many simple, but important lessons to be learned from a garden. Growing and nurturing a plant creates a basis for children to apply to larger issues in life. To plant a seed, watch it germinate and learn that it needs care to thrive reinforces these lessons for a child. To do this together with someone in their family adds to the experience. Some of my most cherished memories come from the time I spent with my grandfather planting in his vegetable garden and tending his bees. He always took the time to explain why each task we did was important to the plant’s growth and how connected the bees were to the plants and vice versa.*

*Vegetable gardening can be especially rewarding for younger children. A lot of vegetable seeds are larger and easier for small hands to handle; they usually germinate in a shorter time and produce edible results within a single season. They can also be grown in pots if there is not yard space available. There are many varieties of vegetables developed especially for pots or small spaces. April is a good month for a visit to the garden center – everything you need for seed starting is in along with staff to help with all your questions. Most cool-season vegetable starts can go directly outside in April. These include spinach, kale, broccoli, cabbage and peas. Warm-season crops can be started inside in April for transplanting later after danger of frost is past. These include melons, peppers, tomatoes, squash and eggplant. Most seed packets will contain information to help you time your plantings. Some of these warm-season plants, like squash, germinate and grow readily and should not be started too much before the frost free date – usually around April 15 in Portland. There are also some plants that do not transplant well and should be directly sown outside. These include beans, corn, beets, carrots and radishes. Many will come in seed tape form which helps in spacing and simplifies planting for little ones.*

*Whether you are growing your vegetables in containers or in the garden the most important thing to remember is that most vegetables need at least 6 hours or more of sunlight. If you are growing in containers make sure they have drainage holes and are large enough – containers that are too small dry out fast. It is also better to use a commercial potting mix. I like to use 2/3 potting soil mixed with 1/3 compost. Watering needs will depend on the size of the plant and temperature. In the beginning it may be only once a week or so, but as the plant grows and the days become warmer it can rise to once or more per day. Vegetables grown in containers will also need a weekly feeding diluted to half strength.*

*For more information on vegetable planting, visit the Portland Nursery website and download a copy of our Veggie Calendar.*