

# City Bites

| FREE |  
(EARLY) SPRING 2011

Special Issue

TORONTO'S GUIDE TO GREAT FOOD & DRINK

## SPICE WORLD

**HOT STUFF  
TO ZAP  
YOUR  
'BUDS!**

**RISING STARS!  
3 PASTRY CHEFS  
TO WATCH**

**TORONTO'S BEST  
FOODIE NEWS!**

**SWEET WINE SECRETS  
BY JOHN SZABO**

**PLUS!** COOKBOOKS + NEW EATERIES + SCHNITZEL + GINGER BEER



# Spring Fling

DON'T WAIT FOR MAY TWO-FOUR TO START PLANTING. GET OUT THERE NOW.

Gardeners are an impatient lot. Especially in the dark days of winter. But short of planning a garden on paper, putting in seed orders, waiting and fantasizing, what can you do? You can start growing now, that's what.

"Season extension" is a technique that allows you to plant in late March or early April so you can be eating by mid-May, when most gardeners are only just starting to get their hands dirty.

All you need is a glass garden bell jar called a cloche, which is placed over a single plant to protect it from the cold. Nice, but not very practical. More effective are hoop tunnels (clear plastic stretched out over semi-circular hoops embedded in the soil) and cold frames (a box with a hinged glass lid). Basically, miniature greenhouses.

Hardy, cold resistant plants such as radishes, salad greens, kale, collard greens and spinach work well here. Off-season growing works much better in raised beds, as the soil is isolated from the surrounding frozen ground. This is vital, as the first step in getting a pre-spring start is to soften the soil using the natural heat of the sun.

Place a sheet of black plastic over the soil, and anchor it with a few rocks or bricks. Remove as much snow as you can, as well as mulch leftover from fall. Over a period of two to three weeks, the black plastic will suck up heat and transfer it to the soil. You're waiting for the top six to eight inches of soil to soften. Then it's time to install the hoop tunnel or cold frame.

Store-bought hoop tunnels work well, or you can make your own from bamboo. An old window makes a good cold frame.

And now it's time to plant. First, amend the soil with good, rich compost, worm castings or both. Sow seeds toward the centre of the tunnel, so the curved sides won't impede growth. There should be a fair bit of humidity inside your greenhouse, so water only occasionally.

## Winter Greens

Use the techniques in this article to extend the growing season on the back end, too. Install the hoops and plant cold hardy veggies in late August. Cover with the plastic as the weather cools, and you'll be harvesting salads and spinach in mid-November, maybe even December.

As it gets warmer, you can prop open the cold frame, or roll back the plastic to expose the plants to fresh air and sunlight, but keep the plastic intact for the inevitable cold spell or early spring snow. Then, get ready for fresh April salads. **CB**

*Marc Green co-owns The Backyard Urban Farm Co. in Toronto. Visit [bufco.ca](http://bufco.ca).*



A hoop tunnel can get your sprouts going early, and keep your greens growing into winter.

PHOTO: MARC GREEN

An advertisement for Rosehill Wine Cellars. It features a large image of a wooden wine cabinet with glass doors on the left. To the right, there is a photograph of a wine cellar interior with numerous wine bottles stored on wooden racks. The text "Rosehill WINE CELLARS" is prominently displayed in a stylized font. Below the name, it says "Wine storage experts for 15 years." and provides contact information: "Visit our showroom at 339 Olivewood Road, Toronto 416.285.6604 • 1.888.253.6807 www.rosehillwinecellars.ca". At the bottom, a list of services is provided: "Wine Cellars • Wine Racks • Cooling Units • Cabinets • Stemware • Accessories • Gift Certificates".

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