



Cultivating Cannabis

Transcript – Getting Started

Welcome back to Cultivating Cannabis. This is module two. We're gonna go over today the basics of getting started with seed starting and cuttings, and how you can get your cannabis garden growing, what to look for in a site and what kind of things the cannabis plant needs to thrive. Cannabis grows much like the tomatoes behind me, so it'll be very similar if you've grown plants like this.

Stephanie Syson: Alright Nate, thanks for joining us on Cultivating Cannabis. I'm really excited to pick your brain about this beautiful plant.

Nate: Great. I'm happy to be here.

Stephanie Syson: Can you tell us a little bit about your history with the cannabis plant?

Nate: Well, I've been growing for about 10 years pretty regularly. Pretty much every full, mostly full season outdoor has like been my wheelhouse. I haven't done a lot of inside stuff. I really learned and studied under some folks in Miniso County in Northern California where they've been cultivating cannabis for a long, long time and yeah.

Stephanie Syson: Yeah?

Nate: I love the plant. It's really interesting, expressive and it's just a wonderful plant and it seems to help people a lot in their lives, so why not?

Stephanie Syson: Great. Well, thanks for sharing your knowledge and experience with the backyard growers that are watching this module. And we'll have to apologize to all you at home. We're in this beautiful greenhouse, but it is by a busy road, so you gonna be hearing cars periodically going by, but we will talk loud and make sure that you can hear everything that we're talking about today. So, to get us started, if someone is just a backyard veggie grower that's used to growing tomatoes and lettuce, how much different is it to add this crop to their garden?

Nate: Well, it's really easy to grow cannabis, but the challenge comes in growing it well as far as like the end result, which is what most people are looking for, is these really expressive flowers. Generally speaking, though, it's not that much different especially something like tomatoes. Like lettuce, yeah, it's a bit different, but tomatoes are heavy feeders too and rather vigorous in the way they grow. And they often like to be trained and pruned and there's a lot of similarities. But most people feed their cannabis plants way more heavily or they at least have a lot more available for the plant to eat because they're trying to maximize what they get out of it, their yields.

Stephanie Syson: It's a pretty hungry plant, you would say?

Nate: Oh, yeah. Absolutely.

Stephanie Syson: And will it grow bigger and bigger the more you give it?

Nate: Pretty much, yeah.

Stephanie Syson: So, compared to like a tomato, that is a pretty heavy feeder, you'd say cannabis is even more so?

Nate: Absolutely.

Stephanie Syson: Okay.

Nate: No doubt about it.

Stephanie Syson: So, if a grower is used to composting their garden once a year for their tomatoes, they would do well to do that much more often?

Nate: Yeah, yeah. You could compost, you could add compost like in a top dress almost every couple weeks in a cannabis garden. They'll love it. They'll eat it right up.

Stephanie Syson: Okay, so really, really, rich soil, lots of feedings for you guys at home. How about the sun requirements of the cannabis plant?

Nate: Generally speaking, it likes full sun.

Stephanie Syson: Full sun?

Nate: Yeah. You know, here in Colorado we're at a bit of altitude and the sun can get a bit intense, so sometimes mid-day, like a 25-30% shade cloth depending -- and there's so much genetic variability, there's so many different strains, that anything that's like more on the Sativa side of things, you know Indica and Sativa, the Sativa's are all from tropical parts of the world where it's really hot and really sunny and they just love the sun.

Stephanie Syson: More sun the better for them?

Nate: Absolutely and the Indica ones are from like Afghanistan and like you know, Persia and areas where it's mountainous, but not nearly as warm and they didn't evolve having so much sun, so they can like a bit more shade sometimes. I wouldn't say shade, but filtered light. Just not full intensity especially if you're at altitude.

Stephanie Syson: So, they don't mind a little dappled shade in the middle of the day?

Nate: Yeah, they actually -- some of them really prefer it.

Stephanie Syson: So, if your backyard doesn't get full sun all the day long, then maybe an Indica would be a better way to go for you?

Nate: Maybe, yeah. And if that's the case, it's okay. It's a pretty tough, resilient plant that'll adapt, but if we're talking about optimal situation, yeah, I think the Indica would probably be better if you have a, you know, partial sun situation.

Stephanie Syson: Okay. How about the water usage of cannabis? Is it something that likes a whole lot of water?

Nate: Yeah, generally speaking, it is something that likes a whole lot of water. Again, there's a lot of genetic variability in that, but they tend to be -- they tend to eat and drink just about what you give 'em. It is possible to overwater, don't get me wrong, but yeah, they're pretty thirsty.

Stephanie Syson: Okay.

Nate: And generally, a lot of people that are cannabis cultivators, they like to use water that's not that complex, like doesn't have a lot of mineral content. People talk a lot about the PPM, the parts per million of dissolved solids in water and most growers agree that less dissolved solids in your water, it's just the more predictable and easy it is to be consistent with your growing.

Stephanie Syson: If you were someone who lives in an urban setting where the only water you have is tap water --

Nate: Good point.

Stephanie Syson: -- that might be chlorinated --

Nate: Yeah.

Stephanie Syson: -- or something like that, how do you feel about that type of water?

Nate: That type of water can be fine, it just needs to be burped, is what we call it, but essentially, I would fill up a reservoir and let it breathe for a day, a whole day, in sun and that way the chlorine will evaporate out because the chlorine will really kill all the life in your soil and it'll affect the plant negatively no matter what.

Stephanie Syson: Okay.

Nate: It's poison.

Stephanie Syson: Yeah, absolutely. And what about rainwater --

Nate: Oh, it's great.

Stephanie Syson: -- and catching that would be better for it?

Nate: Great, yeah.

Stephanie Syson: So, if a person doesn't have a backyard, how do you feel about growing in pots on a porch for instance?

Nate: I'm all for it, you know, do it wherever you can to --

Stephanie Syson: Get this plant in your life?

Nate: Yeah, to get this plant in your life cause it's a really, it's a fun plant to work with and it's so reactive. And like every day you'll see differences and even within moments after you've done -- say you've watered, it's one of the most expressive plants I've ever seen. It'll start to change its posture and say thank you almost. It's really just a rewarding plant to grow, so whatever that takes, whatever situation you're in, I support it. And I've seen creek plants grow in pots on the porch --

Stephanie Syson: Awesome.

Nate: -- you know?

Stephanie Syson: Awesome. So even if you don't have a backyard, you can still grow this plant. So, I'd love to pick your brain a little bit about just the beginnings of the difference between vegetative and flowering state cause those are terms that are out there that if someone has never grown cannabis --

Nate: Sure.

Stephanie Syson: -- they're probably not sure what that means. So just the real basic --

Nate: Sure.

Stephanie Syson: -- of what are those two stages in this plant?

Nate: Okay. So, the vegetative state is when the plant is putting all of its energy, all of its investment into stalk structure and leaf development. It's trying to grow big and bushy and basically build like a skeleton-like a framework to be able to support the flowers that are coming later. So it's the time where, you know, about 75% of the height that you'll see of the final plant will happen and where it'll start to become really -- the vegetative state is the first portion of its life and really it has to do, in nature has to do with the light cycles. So, when the plant is getting more sun in the summertime, it's putting its energy into growing vegetatively and not to producing flowers or fruit which would be seeds in this case.

Stephanie Syson: So again, like a tomato how it starts out --

Nate: Yeah, same things.

Stephanie Syson: --growing big and strong and growing a stalk and growing tons of leaves, but well before flowers.

Nate: Absolutely. Yeah, same, same.

Stephanie Syson: Okay and then what triggers it to go into flower?

Nate: Well, it happens with natural light cycles and again, it's genetic variability. So, people have been playing with the genetics of this plant for so long that it's kind of a little wacky. Nature designed it and what happens is that when light cycles change, when there's only a certain amount of sunlight in the day and a certain amount of lack of sunlight in the day, or the night or whatever, it'll flip is the term used in the industry into the flowering stage. So, then all the energy is no longer going to the stalk structure and vegetative growth, it's going into putting most of its energy into producing the flowers which are, you know, the kind of prize of the whole thing.

Stephanie Syson: Right, that's the part we're looking for --

Nate: Yeah.

Stephanie Syson: -- for the most part. Another thing about this plant that might be different for most of our veggie cultivators are the difference of male and female.

Nate: Sure.

Stephanie Syson: So, what happens and when does that happen?

Nate: Sure. Well, just so we're very clear, the female plant is the one that flowers. That's the one that grows the, you know, buds that most people are after in this situation. The male plant is strictly a pollinator, so it produces pollen which if left to their own devices will pollinate -- it's like the early part of the flower structure, the pistils are the female sexual organs of the plant and when they receive pollen, then they'll produce seed. Most people don't like seeds in their cannabis if they're going to consume it in a way that's common if they're not growing it for seed or something like that.

Stephanie Syson: Okay.

Nate: But what happens is that about the second or third week into flower, the males will start to express, and they can do it very rapidly like overnight. You can, you know, have some plants and they're not yet expressing their sex, well it's actually kind of a little earlier than that I should say. But right when all the plants are starting to flip, some are starting to show female characteristics, some have yet to express characteristics one way or the other like you can get to know a plant and walk away and the next day come back and all of a sudden it has pollen sex all over it.

Stephanie Syson: Wow, that fast.

Nate: Yeah, it's incredibly rapid. So I would highly encourage that to be rigorous in paying attention to that sort of thing because they can also develop really rapidly and pop open, especially if you're growing multiple strains that have, you know, different characteristics as far as how long it takes for them to finish once they start flowering. They can really spoil your efforts in some instances.

Stephanie Syson: We'll definitely talk a little bit more about the male and female and sexing and what that looks like later on when the plants are developing. So, we'll show you some great photos so you can see what the male pollen sex look like. So, on the male to female kind of topic, but to move us into propagation. When folks are looking to either start from seed or start from cuttings if they decide to start from seed, there's this term called feminized seed is something that people will be offered. What does that mean?

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Nate: Well, a feminized seed is essentially -- do you want me to tell you like the process to make feminized seed or did you want --

Stephanie Syson: No, we don't even have to go into the process as much as just what is it and if I'm going to go buy --

Nate: Sure.

Stephanie Syson: -- seed, why do I even want that --

Nate: Sure.

Stephanie Syson: -- or not want that?

Nate: Yeah, feminized seed have been specifically produced to only be female plants. They do not have the appropriate genetic material to produce a male, so the reason that those are sought after by many growers is that you don't have to be so rigorous in, especially in larger growers, but in general you don't have to pay so much attention to whether or not there's a male in there that's gonna pollinate everything because you can trust that feminized seeds don't have that capacity.

Stephanie Syson: Okay. That's a good explanation. So, if someone is looking to grow for the first time and they have the option of seed or cutting, what are your feelings on why they should choose one or the other? And this is a backyard grower that's gonna have eight plants.

Nate: Sure. Well, similar somewhat to feminized seed, cuttings can never be male because they're cuttings of a female, what they call mother plant. So that, you know, takes a little consideration. Makes your life a little easier in a similar way the feminized seed can. I personally lean towards seed. I think they're more vigorous in their initial way that they grow. It's just a more natural thing for plants to be growing from seed versus --

Stephanie Syson: When the seeds have -- usually develop a better taproot for --

Nate: Absolutely.

Stephanie Syson: -- structure and for nutrient uptake.

Nate: Totally. Yeah, yeah. Absolutely stronger root systems across the board.

Stephanie Syson: Okay. So, you're a fan of seed over cuttings?

Nate: I am.

Stephanie Syson: Or cuttings in a pinch?

Nate: Right.

Stephanie Syson: Great. So, when we are starting our seeds, what kind of potting mixes would be good to use? Is it a really picky seed or is it whatever kind of potting mix we usually use for our vegetables, we can probably use for our cannabis?

Nate: You can probably use whatever potting mix you have. That seed contains so much energy in it. That's another reason that I love seeds cause that contains everything it needs to really express life. I think your general potting mix would be just fine. Like we were talking that cannabis does prefer a bit more rich soil than most things, but not from the seedling perspective. You can really, you can burn your seeds if your potting mix is too rich and you don't want to do that. You'll set yourself up for challenges, stunt the plant and don't do that.

Stephanie Syson: So, like in most potting mixes when we're starting seeds, I like to think about drainage.

Nate: Sure.

Stephanie Syson: And I think to think about water holding capacity and so I tend to do some mix of like a coconut core, sand, 10-15% compost. I don't often use perlite or vermiculite, but those are also some really great things to add in sometimes for that viscosity and I like to add eggshells. How do you feel about using eggshells? I feel like it gives good drainage --

Nate: Sure.

Stephanie Syson: -- and maybe one day calcium's available.

Nate: Yeah, one day.

Stephanie Syson: A long time.

Nate: I'm all for it. I really am a proponent for really good drainage, lots of aeration. Cannabis really does like that. The roots can, if they're exposed to moisture for too long, they can develop a thing called root rot where essentially the roots are rotting, but it's because the stagnant water in there it's not draining well. There's not oxygen coming in. So, whatever you got, yeah. Perlite, vermiculite, scoria which is like lava rock, eggshells, sand, some people use biochar nowadays for viscosity. There's a lot of options, but I think at least like 30-40% of your mix by volume should be aeration.

Stephanie Syson: Like good drainage?

Nate: Yeah.

Stephanie Syson: And if we did go the route of cuttings, how do you feel that changes the potting mix ratio for starting cuttings?

Nate: Sure. Well, most likely if you're getting cuttings, you're likely to get them from somebody who's already rooted them.

Stephanie Syson: Okay.

Nate: So, from that perspective, transplanting you can start to really step up the richness. If you're trying to root cuttings, again it needs very, very little and you can root cuttings in peat moss alone, you know, like little peat pots.

Stephanie Syson: Just something that holds moisture.

Nate: Just something that holds moisture, exactly.

Stephanie Syson: Okay.

Nate: You're just kind of setting up the arena for the roots to do what they do to come out.

Stephanie Syson: Great. Well, thanks Nate and we will see you on module four for more on soil and nutrients.

Nate: Alright, thanks Steph.

Brian Gandy: Alright, so real quick I just want to do an overview of how to take a cutting for cloning. So, you'll start with kind of a primary cut. You're just looking for strong, healthy, fresh new growth and we'll take this for right now and take one leaf off of that. If it wants to cooperate. So now we've got, you know, a couple of good true leaves and a nice, firm stem. So, we'll take a 45-degree angle cut here. Take a cleaner cut and then you dip it in rooting hormone, and this is an old horticulture standard, Dip 'N' Grow. There's organic ways to do this and you can even take cuttings without it. It just helps it initiate roots and this a rooting plug. It's made for this, so I kind of tear 'em open and stick it in there like that and voila.

Stephanie Syson: Thanks for watching module two. I hope you're ready to get started.

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