



Starting plants from seed gives you a wider array of plants to choose from, and it allows you to witness your plants' full transformation into maturity.

You have a couple of choices:

1. Sow the seeds directly in an outdoor garden bed (where birds and any number of other bugs, animals and critters may eat them for dinner)
2. Sowing them indoors.

Planting seeds indoors guarantees your seeds will be cozy and safe, so you can begin growing in late winter as you wait for spring to arrive and the weather to become warmer.

Seed trays are a convenient option as well; these store-bought seed trays often come equipped with a humidity dome cover and drainage holes. Place a waterproof tray or gravel tray with no drainage holes in, underneath your container to catch excess moisture and dirt.

## 1. Select your seeds

Large seeds, such as peas, beans, corn, squash, melon, and cucumbers are easiest to sow. They can be easily planted singularly into a modular propagation tray or individual pots

Small seeds, including most greens (salad), tomatoes, peppers, broccoli, cauliflower, carrots and Brussels sprouts, are more difficult to separate evenly by hand. It is recommended these seeds are sown into a seed tray first, and then 'pricked out' (transplanted) when the seeds have germinated.

Flower seeds like poppies, zinnias, nasturtiums, marigolds, and petunias are also wonderful options for novice gardeners.

## 2. Choose a container

You can start seeds off in numerous ways dependant on your space and resources

| Options   |   |
|---|---|
| Small seed pots   |   |
| Reuse egg cartons (as long as you poke drainage holes in the bottom!!)                                  |  |
| Modular seedling trays with lids  |   |
| Seed trays with drainage holes placed in gravel trays (which have no drainage holes to catch the drips) |   |
| Always use a waterproof tray to catch excess moisture and dirt.   |   |
| If you are confident you can also reuse toilet rolls or create newspaper pots                           |   |

### 3. Add your compost to your container

Purchase a bag of multi-purpose, peat free compost for seeds.

First moisten your compost with water (do not over water). Squeeze a ball of compost in your hand and if no water comes out, it's too dry. If a few drops of water fall out, it's just right!!!! Just add more dry compost if the compost is too wet.

Fill your containers within half a centimetre of the top and gently compress it so it's flat on top.

### 4. Plant your seeds

Read the instructions on your seed packet for information on planting depth and spacing.

**Top Tip:** If you've misplaced your seed packet, a rule of thumb is to bury a seed twice as deep as it is long.



Once buried, press the soil gently over and around the seed.

Many types of tiny seeds—like lettuce—require light to germinate, so you should leave these on the surface instead of burying. (Another reason to plant indoors!)

### 5. Cover your container (if required)

If you are growing flowers, cover your seed tray with a plastic dome cover, or a clear plastic bag (and tie) to lock in the moisture and heat necessary for your seeds to germinate. Place your seed tray/pots in a warm, light location such as a window sill

Always check your seed packet for specific guidelines, as some seeds require total darkness to germinate. To speed up the germination process, try using a heat mat to warm the compost from the bottom.

## 6. Water your seeds

Every day or so, check to see if the compost is still moist. If it appears dry, do not use a watering can because it might wash away the delicate seeds. Instead, use a spray bottle to spray a layer of mist over the surface or place your container in a larger tray of water so the compost absorbs water from below.

If you have covered your seeds with a plastic bag or dome cover, then remove it from your container once the seeds have sprouted.



## 7. Care for your seedlings

Keep your seedlings warm and the compost moist (without becoming oversaturated).

## 8. Pricking out your seedlings



For small seeds sown in seed trays, they will need 'pricking out' and separating into a modular tray or individual pots once their first leaves (cotyledons) have appeared.

Fill a modular tray with moist compost.

Using a 'dibber' or the top end of a pencil (or lolly stick) loosen the soil around the seedling and gently lift it out of the soil by its leaf, NOT the stem.

Then, using the dibber, make a hole in a module filled with compost and gently place the seedling in the hole, with the stem low enough in the soil so the cotyledon leaves are just above the soil surface. Lightly press down the compost in each cell to secure the seedling in place. Then water very gently after transplanting to settle the roots into the soil and keep indoors or in a potting shed or greenhouse until the seedlings have grown further and their second set of leaves have sprouted fully.

## 9. Hardening off your seedlings.

'Hardening off' is the process where indoor seedlings are gradually exposed to outdoor conditions like colder temperatures, wind, and direct sunlight so that they don't go into shock due to the change in environment.

Begin this process about 10 to 14 days before your transplant date by placing your seedlings in an outdoor spot protected from wind and sun for an hour a day.



Every day, extend your seedlings' time spent outside by another hour and gradually expose them to more and more sunlight. For hardy annuals, start the hardening-off process just before the last frost so your seedlings can be ready for the start of growing season.

## 10. Transplant your seedlings outdoors.



Once the weather is suitable and your seedlings have adjusted to the outdoors and the risk of frosts has passed, it's time to transplant your seedlings to a garden bed or growing area.

Check your seed packet to see how much space each seedling needs to grow and plan the positioning before planting, to ensure your seedlings have enough space to grow and mature.

When placing a seedling in its new home, make the hole deep enough to get the roots down into the soil rather than growing round in a circle, carefully spread out its delicate roots without damaging them. Lastly, water the seedling to allow its roots to properly bed into its new soil.

Check your seedlings regularly and water every couple of days if the weather is dry.

Source credit – Masterclass.com