

# Seed Starting Tips

By sprouting and nursing your own seedlings, you don't have to wait for warm weather to get your hands dirty. Best of all, starting your own seeds is easy and fun.

## 1. Don't start them too early.

Most annual flowers and vegetables should be sown indoors about 6 weeks before the last frost in your area.

## 2. Place sure bets.

Some plants respond better to home germination than others. Surefire vegetables include broccoli, brussel sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, lettuce, peppers, and tomatoes. Some reliable annual flowers are alyssum, marigolds, and zinnias. Perennials include Shasta daisies and hollyhocks.

## 3. Gather clean containers.

Be sure to poke holes in the sides and bottoms of the containers you use and place them inside trays.

## 4. Use seedling mix.

Use soilless peat moss and mix in equal parts vermiculite and perlite to hold enough water and allow oxygen to flow. Do not use potting soil!

## 5. Sow carefully.

Using a dibber allows you to easily make holes in the seedling mix, about twice as deep as the seed is wide and sow seeds at the depth recommended on seed packet. Cover with more mix unless otherwise specified.

## 6. Top it off.

Lightly sprinkle milled sphagnum moss, a natural fungicide, over everything to protect against fungal diseases that rot seeds and seedlings. Cover the flats with plastic wrap or a clear plastic or glass cover to keep the environment humid. Place them near a heat vent or even on top of your refrigerator. Most seeds germinate at around 70°F.

## 7. Keep seeds damp.

Mist with a spray bottle or set the trays in water so the mix wicks up the moisture from below.

## 8. Lighten up.

At first signs of sprouting, uncover and move the containers to a bright spot - a sunny window, a green house, or beneath a couple of ordinary fluorescent shop lights.

## 9. Label your containers.

There's nothing more frustrating than forgetting what you planted. Use popsicle sticks or plant labels as a easy reminder.

## 10. Toughen them up.

About 2 weeks before transplanting, place seedlings outdoors for a few hours at a time to acclimate them to the harsh conditions of the real world. On a warm day Spring day, move the containers to a protected place, such as a porch for a few hours. Each day gradually increase the plants exposure to the sun and breeze. At the end of the week, leave them out overnight; then transplant them into the garden.

