

Seed Starting Best Practices

1. TIMING



Check the seed packet to determine the optimal time to start the seeds. Generally, seeds should be started indoors about 4-6 weeks before the last frost date in your area. Seed packets offer a lot more information than you may think - such as germination rate, harvest date and sometimes even a ruler to help you measure how deep to plant.

2. CONTAINERS



Use clean containers with drainage holes to start the seeds. You can use anything from plastic cups, egg cartons, or seed-starting trays with cell inserts. If you are using seed starting pots from previous seasons, make sure to sanitize them first.

3. SOIL



Use a high-quality seed-starting mix or make your own using vermiculite, peat moss, and perlite. This will provide a nutritious, well-draining environment for the seeds to grow and thrive.

4. PLANTING



Fill the containers to the very top with the seed-starting soil and moisten it. Plant the seeds to the recommended depth on the seed packet. Cover the seeds and gently press down. A common mistake new gardeners make is planting too many seeds. I have seen people throw an entire pack of 100 radish seeds into one small pot. Remember to pay attention to the spacing instructions on the seed packet and remember that those are instructions for how each individual seed should be planted. It can be helpful to remind each participant that one tiny seed will grow into a huge plant!

5. LABEL YOUR SEEDLINGS

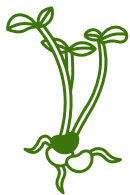


Make sure to label what you have planted! You may also want to include the date. You can either purchase plant labels or make your own by cutting up used sour cream or yogurt containers. There is a resident at one of the places I work who has a label maker and loves to make labels for all the seedlings in the greenhouse. Garden signs and labels can be a great opportunity to engage participants who may be less interested in hands-on gardening.



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6. LOCATION



To help seeds germinate, they need to be kept in a warm, moist environment. Place them in a warm location that gets plenty of sunlight or use a grow light to simulate natural sunlight. Seedlings require at least 14 hours of light per day.

7. WATERING



Be sure to keep the soil moist, but not too wet, as overly wet soil can cause seeds to rot or mold to grow. Keep the soil moist by watering from the bottom of the container rather than directly on top.

8. AIR CIRCULATION



Air circulation is important for seedlings because it helps promote healthy growth and prevents the development of diseases such as fungus.

10. TRANSPLANTING



Once seedlings have grown to a certain size, they can be transplanted into larger containers or outside in the garden.

11. HARDENING OFF



Be sure to harden off seedlings (gradually acclimate) them to outdoor conditions, before planting outside.

9. THINNING OUT



Thinning out seeds is an important practice in gardening because it allows the remaining plants to grow and develop properly. When seeds are first sown, they are often planted more densely than is optimal for their growth. Thinning out involves removing some of the seedlings to create more space for the remaining plants to grow. Wait for the seedlings to develop their first set of true leaves. True leaves are the second set of leaves that appear after the initial seed leaves (cotyledons). You can either pull the seedlings out gently with your fingers (right above the soil line), or use a pair of small sharp scissors. Follow the spacing recommendations provided on the seed packet or plant label and remove any seeds that are within the recommended spacing. After thinning, water the seedlings gently to help them recover from any stress caused by the thinning process.

