



INDOOR SEED STARTING

STEP 1: GATHER MATERIALS

Seeds: select seeds appropriate for indoor seed starting from a trusted source.

Containers: Any container can be used, as long as there are holes for drainage. The larger the container, the less likely the need to "pot up" again before transplanting out into the garden.

Planting Medium: Seed starting mixes (such as coco coir) provide the best conditions for germination, however will not support plants long term. Using an organic potting soil mix will eliminate the need for transplanting young seedlings, but germination may take longer or be less successful.

STEP 2: SOW SEEDS

Moisten the planting medium before filling containers. Fill containers and smooth the surface, but don't pack down tightly. Space seeds 1/2"-1" apart, leaving more space for larger seeds. As a general rule, cover the seeds to a depth of three times their thickness with dry planting medium. Check the seed packet for more precise instructions on depth and other necessary conditions, such as exposure to light.

STEP 3: AIDE GERMINATION

Warmth and moisture are all most seeds require for germination. (Some seeds require other conditions. Check the seed packet for special instructions.) Keep the soil moist but not saturated (covering with plastic can help retain moisture), and put the seed containers in a warm place; around 70-75F is typically ideal.

STEP 4: ENCOURAGE GROWTH

Once seedlings emerge, remove any plastic covering and move them to a spot with bright light and cooler temperatures, around 60-70F. Seedlings need a minimum of 12 hours of light a day to grow strong, and ideally 16 hours. If this can't be provided on a windowsill, supplement with a grow light or a cool-white fluorescent. Keep lights within a few inches of the seedlings and adjust as they grow. Water regularly (check every other day), preferably from the bottom to prevent disease and avoid disturbing the soil.

STEP 5: THIN & POT UP AS NEEDED

Once seedlings have two sets of leaves, it's time to thin and/or transplant. If you have started seeds in a seed starting mix, you can carefully separate seedlings, lift them out with a popsicle stick or teaspoon, and transplant them to a larger container filled with pre-moistened organic potting soil. Carefully handle seedlings by the leaves, not the stems. If you have started seeds in potting soil, select the strongest, healthiest-looking seedling to keep and snip all others off at soil level. In either case, if the seedlings outgrow their pots before it's time to transplant them into the garden, they will need to be moved to a larger container. Signs to watch for are roots growing out of the drainage holes, or a plant that is wider and twice as tall as its pot.

STEP 6: HARDEN OFF

1-2 weeks before transplanting to the garden, start to acclimate your plants to life outdoors. Set the plants outside in a protected area, sheltered from sun and wind. Start with one hour, then two hours, gradually increasing the time outdoors, and also allowing some exposure to direct sun, starting with weaker morning or late afternoon sun. Water frequently.

STEP 7: TRANSPLANT OUTDOORS

Choose a cloudy day, or transplant in the early evening to avoid the stress of the sun's heat. Before you start, water your plants and prepare the holes by digging them twice as wide and the same depth as the pot (except for tomatoes, which should be buried deep enough to cover the bottom set of leaves, which should be pinched off). Also add a scoop of compost and a quart of water to each hole. Compostable pots can be planted whole, but should be split open. Plants in plastic pots should be carefully removed by tipping the pot upside down and tapping the bottom. Gently place the plant in the hole, fill in the hole with soil, and gently tamp with your hands, forming a shallow basin to collect water. Water plants carefully at the base with another quart of water. Keep an eye on new transplants for signs of dehydration, sun scorch or pest damage, and cover or protect as necessary.