



GROWING VEGETABLES FROM SEED

This is a very general guide to growing vegetables from seed at home in pots (or pot alternatives). All plants are different, so do some research on the plants you wish to grow before you get started.

Why grow from seed?

- It reduces waste by avoiding plastic punnets and pots from the nursery.
- It's cheaper than buying seedlings.
- It gives you access to many varieties that are not generally available as seedlings.
- It's fun!

Where to get seeds

You can get seeds from your local nursery, from various online suppliers, or through swapping with others. You can also harvest them from plants growing at the community gardens.



When to start seeds

It's important to start your seeds at the right time of year, so that they are ready for planting at a time when the weather is suitable. Seed packets will indicate when you should plant, and www.gardenate.com is a great resource for finding out what you can plant now in your area.

Sowing in pots vs. sowing directly

The advantage to sowing seeds in pots is that you can start seeds early in a protected environment, and then plant them into the garden when weather conditions are suitable. It also tends to work well for smaller seeds, as they can't wash away like they can in the garden!

However, some plants do not like being transplanted, because they have delicate root systems, and/or because they get damaged in the process and don't grow well (e.g. transplanted carrots are likely to not grow straight).

In general, the following should be planted directly into your garden:

1. Peas and beans
2. Root vegetables, e.g. carrots and beetroot
3. Cucurbits, e.g. pumpkins and cucumbers

If you want to start these seeds in pots, it's a good idea to grow them in something that will break down (e.g. egg cartons) so that they can be planted directly into the garden without disturbing the seedling's root system.



Growing mediums

Seeds should ideally be started in seed raising mix. If you're really clever you can make your own, but you can easily buy it in bags from your local nursery. Seed raising mix is suitable for seeds because of its loose and crumbly texture, fine particles, and the fact that it is sterilised (minimising the risk of disease). It is also low in nutrients, which encourages seedlings to develop stronger root systems because they need to stretch to reach nutrients.



Seed raising mix (left) vs. potting mix (right) – note the difference in texture

Having said all that, we're gardening during a pandemic, so if you only have potting mix on hand give it a go! Many seeds (especially larger ones) will germinate OK in potting mix, especially if you sieve it to remove large particles.

Planting depth

As a general rule of thumb, seeds should be planted at a depth approximately double the width of the seed. That's not very deep! So, small seeds should be just barely covered by a thin layer of seed raising mix, while larger ones can be planted a bit deeper.

Pots & alternatives

You can grow seeds in just about anything as long as it's free draining, from plastic pots and punnets, to toilet rolls, to recycled containers.



Just a few of the many things you can grow seeds in: plastic pots and egg cartons

Planting your seeds – step by step

1. Fill your pot (or pot alternative) with seed raising mix, and gently tap the pot so that the mix settles.
2. Plant 1-3 seeds, at a depth approximately double the width of the seed. Gently cover the seed with seed raising mix.
3. Don't forget your labels! Some easy options include ice cream sticks, old plant labels cut into strips, and pegs.
4. Water the seeds in gently.
5. Place in a warm location, such as in a sunny window.
6. Keep the mix moist – make sure the seeds don't dry out.

Keeping seedlings healthy

1. Put your seedlings in a bright, warm spot. If it's too shady, they will become leggy (i.e. stretched out) as they reach towards the light.
2. Make sure they don't dry out (or get too wet) – the soil should stay moist.
3. Once your seedlings have developed true leaves, you can give them a weekly mild dose of liquid fertiliser.
4. Expose your seedlings to the outside world gradually – if they go straight from a warm windowsill to the garden, the shock could kill them. So, start by placing them outside in the shade for an hour or two, and gradually increase their time outside (and their exposure to wind and sun) until they can stay outside all day without getting too stressed.

DON'T FORGET!

Share your seedlings' progress with your fellow gardeners on our members Facebook pages!

