

18 tips for Starting Seeds

1. Don't be in a rush. Get your timing right for each crop.
2. Don't be cheap; buy fresh seed if there's any doubt. Check on average viability (in years) of a given type of leftover seed, but also ask yourself how well you really cared for it. Seed is alive (but not if you left it in the hot, humid garage all summer).
3. Don't use just any old potting soil; some brands may be too coarse, especially for smaller seeds. A fresh bag of sterile medium labeled "germination mix" or "seed-starting mix" is a safer bet.
4. Cleanliness counts. When re-using flats, trays, cells, and pots, wash with a dilute bleach solution (1:10 bleach:water) or at least hot, soapy water, if you wish to skip the bleach.
5. Do pre-moisten the mix before putting in flats or cells, so it's barely moist and no longer powdery dust. As I said: barely moist, just to take the edge off; not sodden! Trick: If working indoors, I just run water from the kitchen-sink sprayer into the plastic soil bag ahead of time; massage and turn the bag to distribute; then repeat a few times.
6. Do use bottom heat, from a germinating mat, and a dome lid or plastic wrap to create a "germination chamber" of around 70F.
7. ...but don't leave the mat plugged in, or the lid on, once the plants have emerged. Seedlings generally don't like it as warm, or moist, as seeds trying to sprout do.
8. Don't let seeds dry out before they germinate (a recipe for death!)
9. ...but don't overwater once they do. Water requirements drop dramatically as soon as they're up and growing, when letting the soil go slightly dry between waterings is generally the best practice.

10. Do invest in a watering device that's gentle enough for seeds and seedlings.
11. Don't skimp on light once seedlings have emerged, or anytime thereafter. (Don't be surprised if they get spindly if you do.) To be perfectly clear: No windowsill growing!
12. Do take advantage of fair days outside to make up for the limitations of artificial light; I carry my seedlings outside by day.
13. Do direct-sow crops suited to it...but not unless you are committed to keeping the seedbed free from weeds that can outcompete tiny emerging seedlings.
14. Don't rush to transplant, especially with warm-season crops like tomatoes, peppers, eggplants. Nothing is gained by making them shiver before the weather really settles, and much can be lost in the wildest spring weather.
15. Don't transplant seedlings into the open garden that haven't been hardened off gradually, with a few hours a day outdoors over a week or so before to allow for acclimation.
16. Do sow extra, and do "cull the herd" by discarding any weak or "off-type" seedlings at any stage of the process. More is not better if they are runts.
17. Do plan for succession sowings of many crops, sowing only a short row every couple of weeks and avoiding 40 servings of lettuce or 10 pounds of green beans in a single day's harvest. Take advantage of both cool ends of the season to repeat sowing certain crops, such as peas.
18. Don't blame yourself for every failure. Old seed or poorly stored seed or just crappy seed can outsmart your best efforts. Sometimes seed was viable (had the ability to germinate) but lacked sufficient vigor (the ability to thrive). Learn the difference. And then you have the weather to invoke as the guilty party. This is gardening, remember? We can always blame the weather, and then try again.

Source: <https://awaytogarden.com>