

GROWING PLANTS FROM SEEDS

Starting them off indoors

Growing your own plants from seed is cheap and easy. You'll be bowled over by the transformation from insignificant-looking little seed to blossoming flowers and vegetables.

Why start seeds off indoors?

- ✿ Sowing them indoors between March and May will keep them warmer than outdoors.
- ✿ Warmth helps the seeds to germinate. This means you can start sowing seeds earlier in the growing season than if you wait for the weather to hot up.
- ✿ Seedlings that have germinated could suffer from frosts outdoors even during the spring in May.
- ✿ Looking after seedlings indoors will protect them from being snacked on by slugs and snails. These garden pests find young seedlings particularly tasty.



Only healthy seeds will germinate successfully:

- ✿ Make sure seeds are stored in a cool, dry place. A sealable plastic container that you might use for food will do the job.
- ✿ Seeds have different 'shelf lives'. Some can be kept for a number of years (eg poppies or tomatoes) others have a shorter life span (eg parsnips). Check the use-by date on seed packets.
- ✿ If you are not sure that a seed is within its use-by date, or you think it might have been badly stored, you may be wasting your time trying to sow it. Even if the seed does germinate, the plants may not be strong and healthy. On the other hand, gardening is all about experimenting, so you could just try a few out!

When to sow seeds

Most indoor seed sowing is done from March onwards, when it is still too cold outside for most seeds to germinate. You can use a heated propagator or a windowsill.

Check seed packs for the recommended sowing time.

Fast growing vegetables like radishes, salads and peas can be grown at intervals during spring and summer. This means you can harvest them at different times rather than, say, all your radishes being ready to eat at the same time and no more for the rest of the season.

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
a	e	a	p	a	u	u	u	e	c	o	e
n	b	r	r	y	n	l	g	p	t	v	c

- Sow indoors

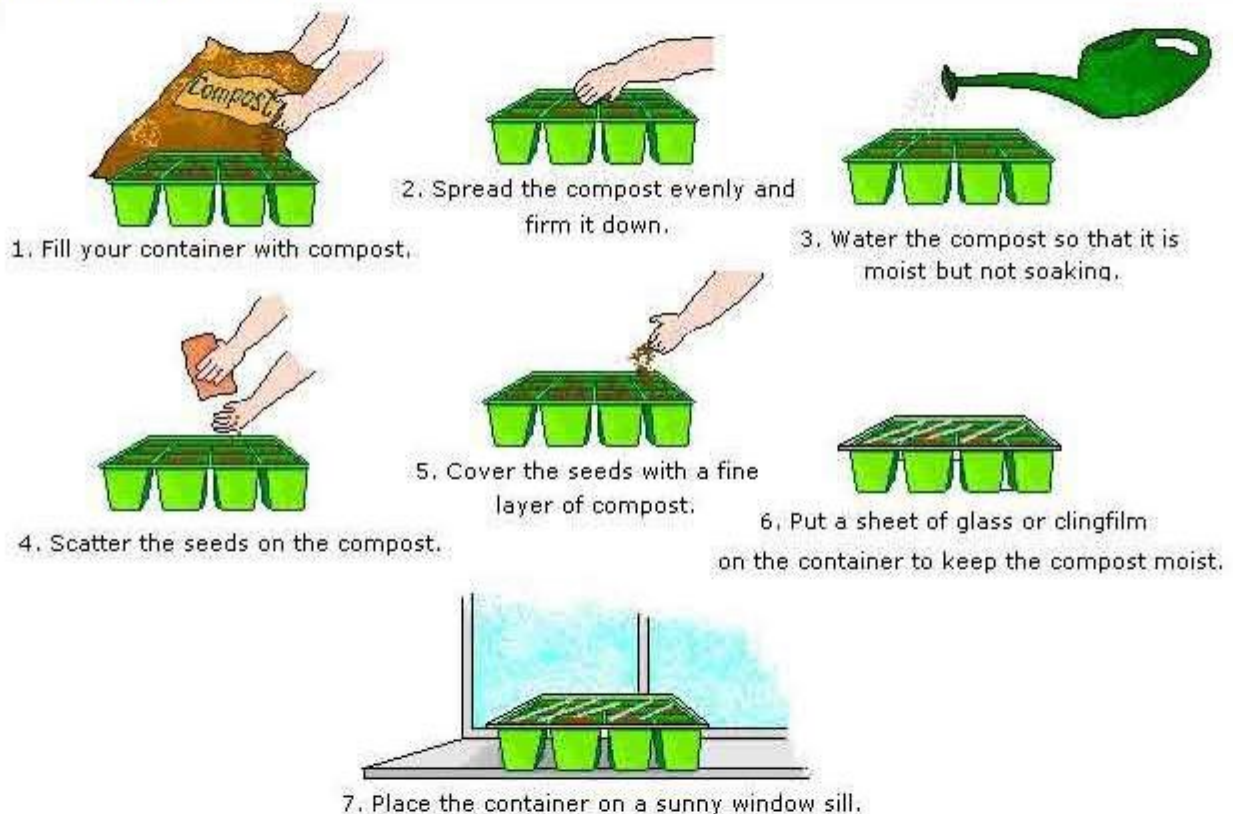
☐ Plant outside

Flower/harvest

Packets of seeds will often have a calendar showing you what time of year to sow indoors and when to plant them out.

They may also tell you when your plant will flower, or when your vegetables will be ready to harvest.

How to sow your seeds



From little seeds ...

It's astounding that huge plants can grow from tiny seeds and fascinating to watch the process. Seeds should be planted at the same depth as their size: big seeds will need thicker layer of compost whilst small seeds need only a fine layer.

Tiny seeds can be difficult to handle. To spread them more easily, you can mix them with light sand. To sow, scatter them over compost in trays or pots.

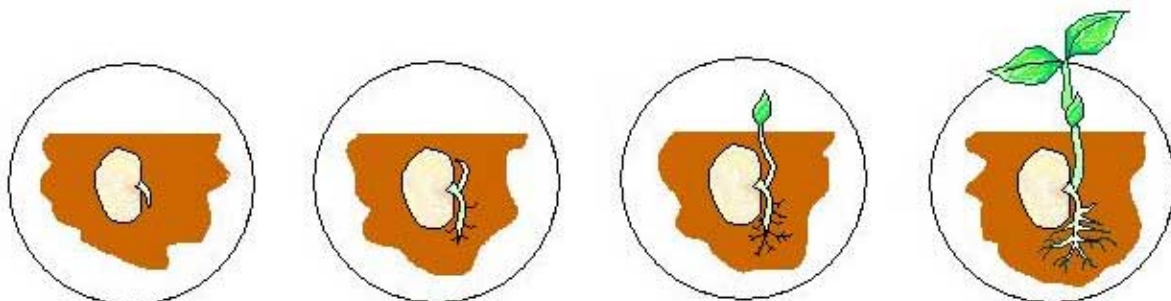
Seeds can be sown in trays, modules or small pots. People often sow more than one seed per module space or pot, in case one doesn't germinate. If they both germinate, you can replot both seeds or pull out and discard the weaker one.



Germination

Keep the compost moist whilst the seeds are germinating. Water with a fine hose water can, so that big splodges of water don't harm the emerging seedlings. If your containers are in a tray or saucer, pour water in the tray rather than directly on the compost or seedlings.

Once the seed has germinated, it will start to sprout a stalk and leaves above the soil. Remove any covering glass or clingfilm once the seedlings appear.



Is waiting for seeds to germinate like watching paint dry? Seeds can take from a few days to a number of weeks or longer to germinate. Most flowers and vegetables should show some action within a couple of weeks, but trees and shrubs are very slow.

Strange leanings

If your seedlings are on a window sill rather than in a greenhouse where the lights is well distributed, you may notice that they start leaning towards the window, aiming for the light.

Turn the pots occasionally so that they don't grow lopsided.



Getting too big for their pots

Seedlings can be 'potted on' to bigger pots once they have grown their 'true leaves'. These are the second set that grow after they've germinated.

Transplant seedlings with care, holding them by their leaves rather than the stem or roots. Use a lollipop stick or something similar to help gently remove them.



Check the bottom of the pots for roots growing through drainage holes—they are likely to need potting on or planting out.

It is generally safe to put most flower and vegetable plants out in the garden from mid-May onwards in the UK, but some can cope with colder weather earlier, for instance sweet peas, potatoes, peas and onions. Check your seed packet for guidance on planting out.

Acclimatising

If you have time, it helps to acclimatise plants that have been started off indoors by putting them outside during the day and bringing them in over night. A big tray is useful for this. Alternatively, put them in a cold frame outside, and open it during the day.

That extra loving

Seeds sown indoors can sometimes be weaker than those sown outdoors. Apparently stroking them helps to harden them up. Brush them daily with a soft brush, or with your fingers, about 10-20 times in one go. According to research from Garden Organic they like being stroked early rather than later in the day.