

Basic Seed Starting

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Equipment needed

- 1) Trays, clear hoods, cell packs, pots of varying sizes, peat pots/pellets
- 2) Potting soil such as Promix or Sunshine, compost or worm castings, horticultural sand
- 3) Labels and small tools -plastic cutlery works very well for transplanting
- 4) Spritzer bottle and No Damp (optional fungicide)
- 5) Notebook to keep track of technique and date started
- 6) Seeds
- 7) Fertilizer (water soluble ex. Wegeners, Fish emulsion (water at 1/2 strength))
- 8) Light source

Technique

- 1) Mix potting soil with 25% compost, Sea Soil or worm castings and premoisten. Pulverize any lumps.
- 2) Fill cells/pots with moist mix and tamp down lightly.
- 3) Make a small depression in each cell and plant at least two seeds /cell (depends on seed size and germination rate).
- 4) Check seeding directions on package for: when to seed (weeks before last frost), light/dark requirements and tolerance to transplanting (some plants resent transplanting). Most seeds need to be covered lightly. Very small seeds should be scattered lightly on the surface and left uncovered (ex. lobelia, nicotiana).
- 5) Gently firm seeds onto soil and cover lightly with fine perlite, sand or more soil. Spritz with water mixed with No Damp.
- 6) Cover with clear hood and place somewhere warm. Most seeds germinate around 70 F. Seeds that require dark should be placed where no light gets at them or covered with dark cloth.

- 7) Check for signs of germination daily. Once germination occurs place flats 3-4" beneath lights. Once most have germinated gradually remove hood. Seedlings need 14-16 hrs of light /day. Continue to raise lights as seedlings grow (but always 3-4" above plants).
- 8) Provide gentle air circulation with a small fan as this prevents diseases and also creates tougher stems.
- 9) Let soil dry out slightly before watering. Water from the bottom and pour off any that has not been absorbed in 10-15 minutes. Seedlings are very sensitive to too much or too little water.
- 10) The first leaves to emerge aren't leaves but cotyledons. The next set are the true leaves. Once the first true set of leaves has emerged thin to the strongest seedling or transplant to another cell/pot. Do this sooner rather than later to avoid disturbing new roots.
- 11) Water every other time with very dilute fertilizer solution.
- 12) After the seedlings have 2-3 sets of leaves pinch out the growing center to make the plants send out side branches for bushy plants. Some plants such as stocks and brocolli dislike this so ensure this is tolerated by the seedlings first.

Transplanting

- 1) Fill new pot with moist soil and leave a depression for seedling. Carefully remove seedling (hold the leaves and never the stem) with root ball intact and place in new pot. Cover with soil. If seedlings are leggy you can bury up to half of the stem without harming the seedling. Don't tamp down. Water in well.
- 2) If transplanting directly to garden harden off seedlings by exposing them to outdoor conditions gradually. Water well with transplant solution (high middle number) the day before planting out. Try and plant seedlings early in the morning or later in the day, preferably on a cool cloudy day. If possible give seedlings some protection from the sun and wind for the first 24 hours.
- 3) Water well and continue to fertilize for a non-stop show of annual color!

