

Seed Sowing v. Shop Bought Seedlings

When I started vegetable gardening many years ago, I would only buy the vegetable seedlings that my local gardening centre had for sale, or I would send away for *plug plants that I had ordered from a seed catalogue. I had it in my head that sowing seeds from packets was far too difficult. How wrong I was.

It's fair to say that if you don't have much space to germinate seedlings and money is no object then buying them from garden centres and seed catalogues is fine. The only problem is that firstly these sorts of veg seedlings are not always in the best condition, especially if they've been cooped up in plastic in the postal system. That brings me onto the other downfall, all that plastic!

It wasn't so long ago that I went into my local garden centre and asked if I could have one of the plastic trays that were piled up high at the back of the shop. Please do, said the cashier, as they just get thrown into landfills as nothing gets recycled in this business. I was shocked and it was at that point I decided to start growing from seed, purely to avoid all the plastic I had been generating.

One other thing about shop bought seedlings and online plug plants is that firstly, it's quite an expensive way of doing things and you may be restricted to only what varieties they have, whereas the seed variety choice is vast.

So, if you fancy growing some produce from seed and haven't done so before, I would suggest starting with just two or three easy things like tomatoes, some sort of squash and cucumbers. These are possibly the easiest to start indoors in pots on the windowsill. Work out how many of each plant you would like to grow and then sow three times the amount. So, if you want 3 tomato plants, sow nine seeds. If you want 2 or 3 of squash and cucumber, sow 6-9 seeds. If you find that everything germinates and you don't lose any on the way, therefore ending up with too many plants, you can always give them away to your friends and family. There will always be the odd occasion that some seeds don't germinate for one of many reasons, so it's always a good idea to have some spare seeds germinating as a backup.

Last year a friend of mine who had started growing from seed for the first time rung me and asked if I would pop round and check on her seedlings as she wasn't sure if she'd done something wrong. When I got there, I could see that there were several small coir pots with lots of seedlings all stretching for the light. I asked her if she had wanted 100 lettuces and 50 tomato plants, to which she replied, "Oh! Wasn't I supposed to put the whole packet in at once?"

You will of course have to buy some potting compost, but you may have some pots left over from plants you've bought before, otherwise you can start your seeds off in a food tray you were going to recycle. Other than that, you're all set. It's so much cheaper doing it this way and seeing your seeds germinate for the first time is quite exciting. I'm always blown away by it.



Gardening terminology * **Plug plants** are young plants or seedlings grown in trays of individual cells.

