

Spring Seedlings

Do you recall as a kid, planting seedlings at school, in a used milk carton? Following the steps provided by your teacher, you carefully planted the seeds in soil, watered them and placed your planting, with your name prominently displayed on the container on the window sill of the classroom.

Today, the process is similar and the results are just as rewarding. Planting seeds is much cheaper than purchasing potted plants and you will buy seeds for many more varieties than you will find for sale as plants. There are a wide range of options and, whether your propensity is for veggies or flowers, you can truly reap what you sow.

As with all successful projects, there are steps to follow that lead to success. Following is a six-step process for seed propagation at home.

1. **Start Small** – When you start the process, there's a tendency to go overboard with your selection. Select up to four different varieties. This provides you an opportunity to get to know the variety and ease into the process. Starting seeds indoors gives plants the head start they need to bring an early harvest and greater yield.
Remember that plants have a life cycle. Make certain you're starting at a time that will yield maximum results for the time needed to propagate the seed.
2. **Use The Right Container** – Be economical and make certain to use containers no larger than 3-4 inches across because you will soon be transplanting the tender plants to the garden. Your goal make certain that the receptacle that is cleaned with a 1-part bleach to 9-part water solution. Make certain the pot has drainage holes to make certain excess water has a good easily. As an alternative, you can use a pot that breaks down in the soil and you may decide to plant them directly in the garden.
3. **Ensure Correct Lighting** – Without proper lighting, seedlings will become stalky, spindly and feeble. Place seedlings in a sunny south-facing window. You might also consider using artificial lighting and can spend up to several hundred dollars although, a T-12 or T-8 fluorescent light will work just as well.
4. **Provide Correct Warmth** – Seeds go through two stages that involves germination and growth. When seeds germinate, they begin to sprout. That's the exciting part of the process when we experience the first results of our efforts. Light is not as important at this stage but warmth is necessary. Consider placing them on top a refrigerator or dryer or by using heating



mats. You can also create a greenhouse effect by placing plastic wrap over your seedlings. Once you see green sprouts about half an inch tall, you move your plants to an area that has a consistent temperature between 60 and 70 degrees.

5. **Be Consistent in Watering** –Plants consist mostly of water and they need it for the photosynthesis that gives them energy to grow. Sow the seeds in moistened mix. Cover the containers to hold in humidity while the seeds germinate--with the cover from your kit, or with a loosely fastened plastic bag. Once they sprout, uncover the containers and water them from the bottom, by pouring water into the tray. Never water the seed-starting mix from the top; that courts disease (especially a fungus disease called "damping off") and may dislodge or damage the sprouts. Make sure air circulates freely so humidity isn't trapped around plants. self watering seed-starting kits are helpful in keeping the water supply steady but these kits aren't magic, though; you still have to keep that reservoir filled with water.
6. **Keep Your Eyes on the Goal** –This is the secret ingredient to successful seed-starting. You'll need to check daily: To see if the seeds have sprouted; to remove the cover when it's time and move the sprouts to proper lighting to make certain they stay properly moist; to keep a self-watering reservoir full; to raise the lights so they stay just the right distance above the plants; and to make sure the lights and timer haven't malfunctioned. If you are starting a few seeds on the windowsill, turn the plants every day so they don't bend toward the light.



Following these few steps will provide you with a bounty of flowers, veggies and plants that you'll be proud to share with family, friends and neighbors. Once you get going with seeds, it may be a challenge for you to pay out of pocket for potted plants. Enjoy, and happy seeding!