

Starting Vegetable Seeds Indoors



The easiest way to start any vegetable garden is direct seeding – wait until the weather warms and plant the seeds directly in the garden. Unfortunately, depending on the weather, it may not be practical to do this. For example, tomatoes and peppers cannot be planted until after the first



frost. Newly emerged seedlings are very tender and easily killed by cold weather. Transplanting hardier young seedlings started indoors allows an earlier start in the garden, which results in earlier yields of certain crops and makes better use of limited garden space. If a few simple guidelines are followed, transplants can be grown with a minimum of problems.

Guidelines:

1. Potting Soil

- A convenient type is a soilless mix that contains peat moss, perlite, vermiculite and some fertilizer.
- This is a sterile mixture and reduces the risk of losing seedlings to damping off.
- Using garden soil is not recommended because it contains insects, weeds, etc.

2. Getting Started

- Containers, pots, flats, etc. are components for starting transplants.
- All containers must have drainage holes.
- DO NOT START TOO EARLY. Seeds started too early become elongated, with little color and weak stems.
- Consult the seed package guidelines as to when to start seeds.

3. Plant Seeds

- Place seeds in containers at the depths recommended on the seed package.
- Plant one or two seeds per individual container, or, if using flats, in rows that can be thinned or transplanted into individual containers following germination.
- Label the flats and containers using a water resistant marker.
- Place container or flat in a shallow pan so you can bottom water the container.

4. After Germination

- Keep soil moderately moist and warm.
- Sealing the container in a clear, plastic storage bag until the seedlings emerge will keep the soil moist.
- Once the seedlings emerge, remove the plastic bag and give the seedlings as much light as possible. (A sunny window sill, or two to four inches below a fluorescent light.)
- Maintain room temperatures between 60-70 degrees.
- Fertilize with quarter-strength soluble fertilizer.

5. After first true leaves

- When seedlings develop their first true leaves, transplant those started in flats to individual containers.
- Dig the seedlings out of the mix with a small trowel or spoon. Do not pull out by the stem or root system.

6. Hardening off

- One week before the seedlings are transplanted, they should be 'hardened off' by bringing the seedlings outside to a protected area (no Wind) and a sunny spot.

7. Planting Outdoors

- Firm the soil around the root ball and water immediately with a solution of water and starter fertilizer.