



HOW TO START SEEDS

Growing plants from seed is a great way to start gardening earlier in the season. With the right light and some simple equipment, it's easy to grow from seed to harvest.

Because each plant has unique seed-starting requirements, it helps to start small by growing just a few varieties. Some seeds — such as tomatoes and marigolds — are especially easy to start indoors. If you're a beginner, choose those first, and then move on to more fussy seeds.

Other good choices for beginners: basil, zinnia, coleus, nasturtium, cosmos.

LIGHT



Make sure you have lots of light.

All seedlings require a considerable amount of light, so make sure you have a sunny, south-facing window. If seedlings don't get enough light, they will be leggy and weak.

If you don't have a sunny, south-facing window, invest in grow lights and a timer. It's the best way to ensure consistent, abundant light. Set the timer for 15 hours a day, water regularly and you're sure to get great results.

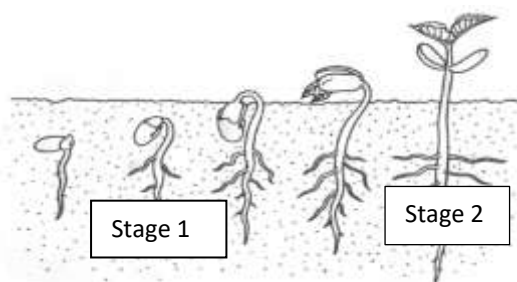
WATER



As the seedlings grow, use a mister or a small watering can to keep the soil moist but not soggy. Let the soil dry slightly between waterings. You may want to feed the seedlings regularly with liquid fertilizer, mixed at the rate recommended on the package.

Stage 1: Seeds have not yet germinated (sprouted). Pour water beside the pots within the tray and not directly onto the soil or seedlings. Leave a dome or plastic covering on the tray until the plants have germinated to prevent the soil from drying out.

Stage 2: Once the seedlings have germinated, and grown approximately 1" in height, you can water the soil directly, but be sure not to water plants themselves.



SOIL



Choose potting soil that's made for growing seedlings. Start with a fresh, sterile mix that will ensure healthy, disease-free seedlings.

Good-quality "potting soil" for seed starting doesn't actually have any soil in it. This sterile, free-draining mix is perfect for seedlings.

WHEN TO PLANT

The goal with seed starting is to have your seedlings ready to go outside when the weather is favorable. Consult a chart for your planting zone, or look at the seed packet, which should tell you when to start seeds inside. Example: Plant inside six to eight weeks before last frost.

In Greater Sudbury, aim to plant the first or second week in June. Many gardeners wait until after the June full moon to plant.



PLANTING AND CARING FOR YOUR PLANTS

Find the right containers: You can start seeds in almost any type of container, as long as it's at least 2-3" deep and has some drainage holes. You can use peat pots, plastic pots, or more creative solutions that you can find on the internet.

Plant the seeds: Check the seed packet to see how deep you should plant your seeds. Some of the small ones can be sprinkled right on the soil surface. Larger seeds will need to be buried. Moisten the newly planted seeds with a mister or a small watering can. To speed germination, cover the pots with plastic wrap or a plastic dome that fits over the seed-starting tray. This helps keep the seeds moist before they germinate. When plants sprout about 1", remove the cover.

Caring for your plants: Keep seedlings away from draughts as plants can get shocked and die. Pots may dry out more quickly if placed near a vent. If you're growing in a window, choose a south-facing exposure. Rotate the pots regularly to keep plants from leaning into the light. Make sure that you water, but don't overwater or your seeds may not grow or your plants will rot. If plants start to get too big for their containers, you may want to "pot up" to a larger pot.

Move seedlings outdoors gradually: It's not a good idea to move your seedlings directly from the protected environment of your home into the garden. You've been coddling these seedlings for weeks, so they need a gradual transition to the great outdoors. The process is called hardening off. About a week before you plan to set the seedlings into the garden, place them in a protected spot outdoors (partly shaded, out of the wind) for a few hours, bringing them in at night. Gradually, over the course of a week or 10 days, expose them to more and more sunshine and wind. Only put trays outside if temperature is above 10 degrees C to reduce risk of freezing the plants. A cold frame is a great place to harden off plants.



GENERAL INDOOR SEEDING CHART

February: onion

March: eggplant, leek, onion

April: broccoli, brussel sprouts, cabbage, eggplant, leek, lettuce, onion, peas, peppers, swiss chard, tomato

May: beans, cucumber, kale, pepper, squash, tomato, watermelon

June: kale

It is recommended that other crop seeds are planted outdoors in the garden, in particular carrots, corn, potato, pumpkin, radishes.