

Growing Vegetables from Seeds

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April 14, 2017

A fun and inexpensive harvest

Growing your own vegetables from seeds is fun, less expensive than growing from plant starts and much less expensive than buying the same vegetables at a store. Starting with seed gives you a much wider choice of cultivars for any particular vegetable, too.

Growing vegetables from seeds involves these steps:

- Pick a garden site
- Determine soil composition
- Prepare soil for planting
- Purchase seeds
- Plant!

Picking a Garden Site

The primary consideration for success with seeds is making sure the plants get adequate light, heat, water and nutrients.

Vegetables can be grown directly in the ground, in raised beds or in containers.

Row gardens and raised beds should face north to south to get all the sun needed for success.

Ground level gardens need space between plants for watering, weeding and other chores. Mounding soil to create small hills for plants helps warm the soil and allows you to water between growing rows to avoid getting water on the leaves.

Raised beds bring the soil closer to you and allow you to create a soil customized for the plants you grow.

Containers can range from large pots, hanging baskets, to planters you can move easily move to give plants more or less sun.

What Kind of Soil Do You Have?

Before you put seeds in the ground, you need to know what kind of soil you have and whether it is warm enough and dry enough for seeds to germinate.



Believe it or not, all these vegetables were started from seed. Photo by Nancy Crowell / *WSU Skagit County Extension Master Gardener*.

The soil in your yard is made up of many elements. The combination of these elements determines how well your soil holds—or loses—water and other nutrients.

- Clay soil particles stick together and make it difficult for roots to grow downward.
- Sandy soil lets water and nutrients pass through too quickly.
- Loamy soil contains sand, silt, small amounts of clay and decomposed plant material. It is also best for growing vegetables.

You can have soil analyzed by sending soil samples to a laboratory for analysis. Search your Internet browser for "soil test labs."

Before you plant seeds outdoors, the soil must be moist enough and warm enough for seeds to germinate.

Soil is too wet for planting if you squeeze a clump of soil and water squirts out. Turn the top 6-8 inches of soil to expose it to the sun and speed up the drying process.

Most vegetable seeds want a soil temperature between 50 and 70 degrees Fahrenheit. The back of the seed packet gives the optimum soil temperature for planting.

You can test soil temperature using a soil thermometer available in garden catalogs and hardware stores.

Buying Seeds

As you cruise the seed racks or catalogs, think about what types of seeds you want for your garden. There are two major types:

Open-pollinated are pollinated naturally by bees, insects or even the wind. Seeds from an open-pollinated plant produce the same plant as the plant it came from.

Hybrid seeds are created in a laboratory by combining pollen of two varieties of the same plant in order to get a seed with the best characteristics of each parent plant. When a hybrid plant goes to seed in your garden, only the seed of one of the parent plants is produced. Hybrid and open-pollinated seeds are also sold as organic (from plants grown without the use of man-made chemicals) or non-organic (from plants grown in fields where man-made chemicals may be used as fertilizer, weed suppressants or insect control).



If you are fortunate enough to have a greenhouse, you can always start your vegetable seeds inside before the soil is really warm enough to accommodate them. *Photo by Nancy Crowell / WSU Skagit County Extension Master Gardener.*

Plant

The soil is the right temperature. The air is the right temperature. Let's plant those seeds! These steps are for planting in a row garden or raised bed.

1. Using a trowel, push the soil in to one side to create a planting furrow the depth indicated on the seed packet whose seeds are going in the ground or raised bed.
2. Put seeds into the palm of your hand, then pick up one seed and place the seed in the planting furrow.
3. Move the recommended distance away from that seed and put another seed into the row. Continue until the row is full or the seeds are gone.
4. Following package directions, gently push the soil you pushed aside back over the planted furrow. Lightly tamp down the soil to remove air pockets.

Don't waste seeds (and money) by dribbling them out of the packet until the packet is empty. Most of the germinated seed will need to be pulled out of the ground to make room for any of the plants to grow to a useful size.

RESOURCES:

- “Home Vegetable Gardening in Washington State.” Gardening in Washington State. <https://pubs.extension.wsu.edu/home-vegetable-gardening-in-washington-home-garden-series>
- “Growing Food in Parking Strips and Front Yard Gardens.” Gardening in Washington State. <https://pubs.extension.wsu.edu/growing-food-in-parking-strip-and-front-yard-gardens-home-garden-series>
- “Raised Beds: Deciding if they Benefit Your Vegetable Garden.” Gardening in Washington State. <https://pubs.extension.wsu.edu/raised-beds-deciding-if-they-benefit-your-vegetable-garden-home-garden-series>
- “WSU Soil: Home Soil Sampling.” <http://gardening.wsu.edu/compost-and-mulch/>
- “Home Gardener’s Guide to Soils and Fertilizers.” <https://pubs.extension.wsu.edu/a-home-gardeners-guide-to-soils-and-fertilizers-home-garden-series>
- “Organic Soil Amendments in Yards and Gardens.” <https://pubs.extension.wsu.edu/organic-soil-amendments-in-yards-and-gardens-how-much-is-enough-home-garden-series>
- “Growing Vegetables West of the Cascades.” Steve Solomon, 6th Edition, Penguin Random House.
- Gardening | Soil Management. Washington State University. <https://puyallup.wsu.edu/soils/gardening/>
- “Soils of the Puget Sound Area”, Craig Cogger, PhD, Washington State University, Assoc. Soil Scientist, WSU Puyallup Research and Extension Center.



To learn more about home gardening, go to the "Gardening in Washington" page at <http://gardening.wsu.edu/>

Move your mouse pointer to the vegetable garden and click to open a list of downloadable articles about vegetable gardening.

Note: some hyperlinks in this article have been updated since its initial publication.