



SEED STARTING

There are two methods for starting seeds indoors. In the one-step method, seeds are sown directly into individual containers. This method is best for large seeds and plants that do not transplant well. In the two-step method, seeds are first sown in a seed tray or flat. When the second set of true leaves appear, seedlings are transplanted into individual containers.

DISEASE FREE SOIL OR SOIL-LESS MIX

For the two-step method, first sow seeds in a purchased sterilized seed starting mixture. Or, make your own mix by combining one part peat moss with one part vermiculite. For the one-step method, or when ready to transplant to individual pots in the two-step method, purchase sterilized potting soil. You can make your own by mixing together one quart vermiculite, one quart peat moss, and slow release fertilizer (follow label directions).

CONTAINERS

For the two-step method, start seeds in purchased plastic or peat seed trays or use disposable household containers such as milk cartons. Sterilize containers with a diluted bleach solution (one part bleach to nine parts water). Make several drainage holes. There are many choices for individual containers. Peat pots, peat pellets, fiber blocks and cubes all allow transplanting without root disturbance. Plastic cell packs work well for small-seeded annuals. Paper cups and foam cups make economical containers.

PROPER LIGHTING

Inadequate lighting is the most common cause of poor-quality transplants. Artificial lighting is necessary to produce healthy, stocky plants. Fluorescent lights are recommended. Standard cool white fluorescent tubes are fine.

PROCEDURES FOR STARTING SEEDS INDOORS

1. Thoroughly moisten the potting soil before planting. This is the easiest to do when the soil is still in the bag.
2. Fill the containers to 1/4 inch of the brim. Pat down top of soil lightly.
3. Sow seeds at the depth and spacing in the package directions. Vermiculite is a good material for covering the seeds. Some seeds need to be covered to twice their thickness. Some seeds need light to germinate and should not be covered. Use a fine spray to moisten the surface.
4. Cover the containers with a sheet of clear plastic wrap or enclose them in a clear plastic bag. Be sure that you remove the plastic a few minutes each day to provide ventilation.
5. Check the package directions for temperature germination requirements. Most seed germinates at 70 to 75°F. Some seeds like to be kept warmer. The top of a refrigerator or 4 to 6 inches under lights is good for these. Some seeds require an initial chilling, freezing or soaking.
6. Once the seed germinates, remove the plastic wrap or bag. Place the containers 6 to 8 inches under fluorescent lights for 14 to 16 hours a day. Most plants grow best with a temperature of about 70°F during the day and about 60°F at night.
7. If seed was started in a seed tray, transplant to individual containers when the plants have developed their first set of true leaves.
8. Check moisture daily. Keep soil moist but not soggy. Sprinkle the top gently, or better yet, water from the bottom.
9. Transplants must be “hardened off” gradually before planting out in the garden. This can be accomplished by exposing plants to increasing amounts of cold, sunlight and wind. At first, place them outside in a sheltered, shady area. Bring them back inside at night. Gradually increase exposure.

WSU Extension programs and employment are available to all without discrimination. Evidence of noncompliance may be reported through your local Extension office.

For more information contact WSU Chelan County Master Gardeners at (509) 667-6540 or <http://www.ncw.edu/mg/chelanmg.html>.

Adapted by WSU Chelan Master Gardeners from WSU Spokane Master Gardener publ. C104.