



The DIRT Society The Basics of Starting Seeds

Planting seeds is the fundamental start to growing a garden. While it's a simple and rewarding task, there are a few things you should know; tricks, tips, and basic science that will give you the best possible results.

Consider seeds for a moment; they're little plant-producing factories packed into a protective shell. Seeds you hold in your hand aren't only genetic material; they're also food, defense and transportation. Every tool a mature plant could devise in order to reproduce effectively is loaded up and sent to work... as a seed.

That said, **seeds are eager to grow**. To package and market seeds, producers have to inhibit the natural behavior of a seed by keeping it cool, contained, shaded and dry. Left to its own devices, a seed will begin its metamorphosis into a mature plant at the first sign of a hospitable environment.

So growing seeds is, basically, easier to do than it is to prevent.

Seeds require very little if they are to grow into successful garden crops. You will need to provide soil, moisture, warmth and sunlight. You should dedicate a little time, every day, to their welfare. Finally, you should prepare to care for the seedlings (immature plants) that are the result of well-tended seeds. If you can commit to providing those very simple materials and services, nothing should stand between you and a garden.

Like the plants they are sourced from, seeds will grow differently from each other. Whenever possible, familiarize yourself with the following seed-specific information. (You can find this on packaging material, ask the person who sold or gave you the seeds, or search for the plant online.)

How long will this plant take to sprout, mature, or produce fruit?

Does this seed need to be pretreated in any way?

Should I start this seed indoors, or sow directly outside?

If the former, when should I transplant the seedling?



As mentioned before, seeds are ready to grow; the only thing stopping them is you. But a little extra information will help you determine the best way to care for them as they develop.

To plant a seed and support its growth, follow these steps:

1. Mix a slightly moist, healthy, organic, fertile soil.
2. Determine the depth at which to plant the seed.
3. Place seed and cover. Water lightly to set the seed in place.
4. Allow seeds to sprout in a warm environment.
5. Keep soil moist by misting or gently watering as needed.



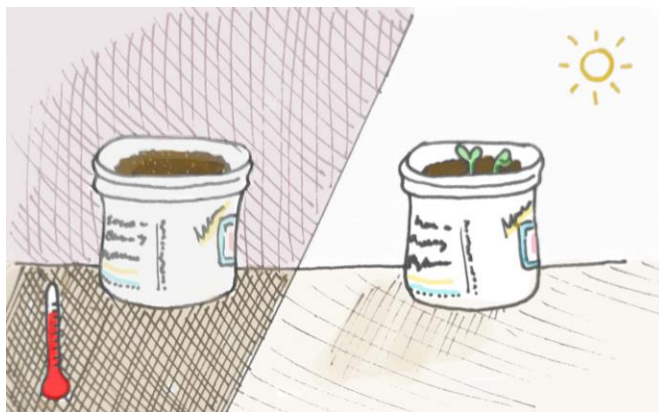
For the best plants, provide the best soil. This is easily accomplished if you compost, or have access to compost. A good alternative would be organic compost purchased at a local nursery or garden shop. New seedlings will respond well to healthy, rich soil, and may grow less enthusiastically when housed in spent, poor dirt.



If you multiply your seeds' lengths by 3 or 4; that is roughly the depth at which they should be planted. You can most often achieve this by scattering seed on the soil's surface and covering with loose dirt sprinkled by hand. If more depth is required, poke a small hole.

Keep the seeds slightly moist, but never soak them when watering. Not only could you displace the seed (which may already have positioned itself using its innate sensitivity to gravity and light,) but you could inadvertently be creating a better environment for mold than plants.

Plants love the sun, so a sunny spot will be a natural choice for location. Before sprouting, however, seeds only need to be warm. A good spot could be in the rear car window, by the kitchen stove, on top of a shelf or refrigerator, etc. Once you see leaves, you'll know that the seedlings are willing to sacrifice a little warmth for additional light.



When the seeds sprout and the first leaves unfold, it will seem to happen overnight. What was a bit of dirt one moment will be a tiny, green seedling the next. It happens quickly, efficiently, beautifully, and with very little investment; all likely reasons that so many gardeners and farmers prefer to sow seeds themselves.