

Why start your own seedlings?

Save Money

- For example, a pack of lettuce seeds costs less than one head of lettuce — and a pack of seeds planted successively can give you lettuce for most of the summer.
- The price of starter plant from a garden center can start at \$1⁴⁹ and can go up to up to \$12⁰⁰ per plant.
- You can re-use the majority of the Seedling Starter Supplies every year.

More Control

- You will know exactly the fertilizers and pesticides that go into your food and flowers because . . . well, it's all in your hands.
- There is more variety available in seeds than in starters you can get in garden centers.
- Freshly picked vegetables straight from your garden are more healthy and more flavorful. And the faster cut flowers are put in water, the longer they last.

Personal Satisfaction

- Not only do you get a greater appreciation in growing your own food, not only can you brag to your friends & family, not only can you get some recommended exercise, but you get a better connection to the earth *and* it is FUN!

Want more detail? Check out these sites.

- <http://gardening.wsu.edu/library/vege009/vege009.htm>
- <http://king.wsu.edu/gardening/fs07.htm>
- <http://www.organicgardening.com/feature/0,7518,s1-5-19-178,00.html>
- <http://www.plantea.com/seedstart.htm>
- http://www.theorganicreport.com/pages/526_start_your_own_seedlings.cfm
- <http://gardening.about.com/od/gardenprimer/a/SeedStarting.htm>
- http://www.inthegardenonline.com/techniques_startingseedsB21.htm
- <http://www.motherearthnews.com/Organic-Gardening/2001-12-01/Start-Seeds-Indoors.aspx>
- http://seattlepi.nwsource.com/nwgardens/348438_wingate24.html



Simple Seedling Starting

Start your own seedlings and be sure your plants are raised organically from the beginning.

Supply List

How-to Guidelines

Websites to reference

Seedling Starter Supplies

Containers

Any container 2" to 3" deep with drainage holes will work. Small pots for initial planting and 2" to 4" pots for repotting at 4 to 8 weeks.

Holding tray

A box lined in plastic or an actual tray that will hold your seedling containers and water.

Watering device

A watering can is good; a spray bottle to mist is useful.

Grower's mix (aka Seed Starters mix)

Lighter than regular soil this mix allows seedlings to germinate (emerge) easier

Seeds

Always read seed package for specific instructions. Surefire vegetables/herbs to try include basil, green beans, broccoli, brussel sprouts, cabbage, chives, lettuce, onions, peppers, pumpkins, squash, and tomatoes. Reliable annual flowers are alyssum, cosmos, marigolds, and zinnias. Reliable perennials include Shasta daisies, columbines, and hollyhocks.

Labels

Light source

A shop fluorescent bulb lighting system works good. Use one cool bulb and one warm bulb for the optimal light.

Light timer *(optional, but really helpful)*

Plastic bag or plastic sheeting *(optional)*

Chains & Hooks *(optional, but really helpful)*

Plant Heating Mat *(optional)*

Seedling Starter Guidelines

Location

A spare bedroom, basement, or sun porch make a good Growing Area. Aim for a room temperature of 60° to 75°. If your room is on the cold side, you can use a plant heating pad if you wish, but only use it until the sprouts appear. *Caution:* Only use heating mats certified for seed starting use. If your Growing Area is consistently between 60° to 75°, this mat is probably an extravagance.

Prepping & Choosing

Start with something like a Mini Greenhouse Seed Starter Tray — it provides a planting flat, a holding tray, and a clear dome. Used planting flats and containers should be disinfected with 1 part bleach/10 parts water.

When choosing what to plant, remember some seeds produce better when sown directly in the soil once it warms up. Other seeds require soaking or chilling before planting. **Always** read the back of the seed envelope for details.

Planting

First, lightly moisten your Seed Starter mix. Fill containers about two-thirds full and tap the container to settle the potting mix. Gently firm. Drop seeds & cover to a depth specified on the seed package. Small seeds can be sprinkled lightly. Count out larger seeds and plant with at least 3 seeds per container (not all seeds will germinate and you can thin extras later). Label your plants as you plant the seeds (Trays will shift around, plants will get mixed up, memories will fail. Make your life easier and use labels). Mist, sprinkle with water, or set containers into a tray with some water in the bottom so the mix wicks up the moisture from below. **Do NOT let mix get soggy.**

You can loosely cover the flats or pots with plastic wrap or a dome to keep in some humidity. The plastic should NOT be air tight or you will promote mildew, which is not good. If you use a plastic bag or plastic sheet, cut straws or toothpicks can help keep the plastic up off the soil.

When things sprout

At the first signs of seedlings, take off plastic, remove any heating mats, and expose to fluorescent shop lights. Here in Seattle we don't get the 12 to 18 hours of daylight these seedlings need. Even with a fully southern, bright sunny window, set up a fluorescent bulb lighting system. Suspend the lights no more than 2 inches above the plants. As the plants grow, be sure to move the lights up so the plants do NOT touch the bulbs (they will burn!). A hook-n-chain system can help with this. Turn the planting trays every other day keeps the plants from leaning too much and getting spindly, which is not good. If you can remember to switch the lights on and off, a light timer is an indulgence. For most, it is a necessity.

Water consistently. Don't let your seedlings dry out, but don't let them be soggy either. Try to use room temperature to lukewarm water. Begin to fertilize your seedlings once they get their first "True leaves." ("True leaves" emerge after the cute, round cotyledon leaves.) Lightly ruffling seedlings that

have grown their true leaves a couple times a day helps them grow strong. Apply the first dose of fertilizer at half the recommended strength. Then fertilize at two-week intervals with the dilution recommended by the manufacturer.

Re-potting

As seedlings outgrow their containers or get crowded, thin out the weak ones by snipping them off, then carefully repot them into larger containers with a mix that includes compost.

Hardening off

For a week or two before the plants go outside, start acclimating them. On a warm day move the plants to a shady spot for increasing amounts of time. Gradually increase the amount of time they spend outside and the amount of sunlight they receive. Bring them in or cover them if the temperature dips.

Leave the plants outside the night before transplanting. Water seedlings well before and after transplanting. Try to transplant on a cloudy day if possible.