



GROWING VEGETABLES & FLOWERS

FROM SEED

Hints and Tips on Growing

Joyce Gibson

January 2011





GROWING VEGETABLES & FLOWERS FROM SEED



The skills for growing from seed are easily learned and the equipment required need not be expensive.

Many vegetables can be grown very easily from seed. Always read the information given on the seed packet carefully before starting.

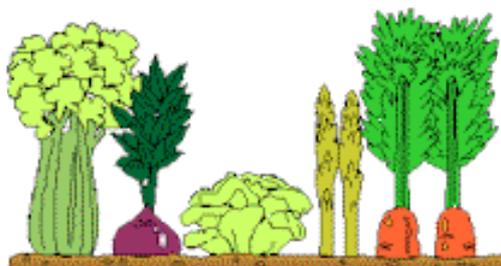
Many vegetables grown on an allotment can be sown directly into the soil outdoors when the soil has begun to warm up. These include carrots, turnip, swedes, beetroot, leeks, beans and peas.

Plants that need extra warmth to germinate e.g. tomatoes, courgettes, lettuce and cucumber can all be started off by sowing seeds into trays or pots indoors. This could be in a heated greenhouse or on a warm window ledge indoors.

In order to get off to an early start in the growing season, some gardeners also start vegetables such as leeks, cauliflowers, peas and beans indoors. These would then be transplanted outdoors when conditions are suitable.

There are also many flowers which can be grown from seed. As with vegetables the tender ones can be started off indoors and transplanted outdoors when all risk of frost has past. The more hardy ones can be sown directly into their growing position outdoors.

Flowers are an essential part of an allotment as they attract insects which assist in the pollination process.





SOWING SEEDS INDOORS



Choose your seed and follow the instructions on the seed packet regarding the best time to sow, noting any special details about the seeds.

Container

Many types of container are suitable provided they have holes at the bottom for drainage. Plastic ones are ideal.

Compost

Use a Seed or Multi Purpose Compost. Fill container with compost and firm gently - the surface should be about $\frac{1}{2}$ inch from top of container. Water compost with a watering can fitted with a fine rose. Leave for an hour before sowing seed.

Cover & Label

Follow instructions on seed packet. Sow seeds thinly and evenly over the compost. Large seeds can be sown individually into the compost. Some seeds require light; others don't. Fine seeds should not be covered with compost; others require covering with a light sprinkling of compost. Cover with a sheet of glass, cling film or any clear plastic cover. Write the date and plant name on a label, and place with container.

Warmth

Most seeds require a fairly warm temperature (65 - 70°F) to germinate. A warm windowsill is ideal.

Light & Water

Check daily - as soon as seedlings emerge remove all covering. Place container in a light spot out of direct sunlight. Keep compost moist; a mist sprayer is ideal.

Prick Out

As soon as the first set of true leaves has opened, the seedlings should be carefully pricked out into trays or pots, to give them space to grow on.

Harden Off

Once seedlings are well established they should be hardened off before planting them outdoors. This involves a gradual move from the warm environment to cooler environment and then eventually planted outdoors



SOWING SEEDS OUTDOORS



Choose your seed and follow the instructions on the seed packet regarding the best time to sow, noting any special details about the seeds.

Step 1

Prepare the seed bed by digging over the area first with a garden fork. Choose a day when the ground is not too sticky or wet so that it is easy to work the soil. Remove all weeds, especially perennial weeds and their roots. Using a rake or a hoe break up any large clods of soil until the surface is made up of fine crumbs of soil; this is called a fine tilth.

Step 2

Use a line (length of heavy string drawn taut between two sticks) or a plank of wood as a straight edge. For a standard row of plants, make a shallow trench in the soil; the seed packet will inform you of how deep this should be. A cane, trowel or the edge of a hoe can be used to make this trench.

Step 3

Fill the trench with a [Multi Purpose Compost](#). Water the trench and sow the seeds directly into this compost at the spacing suggested on the seed packet. Cover over with a sprinkling of more compost and then fill in the trench with fine soil.

Step 4

Mark where the row of seeds is and label with the name of the variety and the date it was sown. Water the area when the weather is dry and watch out for developing seedlings. You may need to protect the seedlings from slugs and also with garden fleece or cloches if it is early in the season.

Step 5

From the start, weed control is very important as weeds compete with plants for water, nutrients and light. Carefully remove all weeds; initially by hand whilst seedlings are very small and then carefully hoe off the weeds between the rows of plants. Choose a dry day to hoe as weeds can easily regrow in wet weather. As well as keeping the area weed free, hoeing helps aerate the soil. Frequent hoeing also creates a dust which helps conserve moisture in the soil. Slugs and snails hate the rough surface created by hoeing so plants are less prone to attack.

GROWING PLANTS FROM SEED

GLOSSARY

Compost	A soil mixture designed for use in containers. Usually light and sterile and often contains peat.
Cotyledon	A seed leaf; the first leaf to emerge from the seed after germination, often markedly different from mature leaves.
Germination	Germination in plants is the process by which a dormant seed begins to sprout and grow into a seedling under the right growing conditions.
Hardening Off	Gradually moving plants from a warm environment to cooler conditions in order to prepare them for outdoor conditions.
Pricking Out	The transferring of young seedlings from where they have germinated in beds or pots to positions where they have room to grow on.
Propagator	A structure that provides a humid atmosphere for raising seedlings.
Seedling	A young plant that has developed from a seed.
Seed Propagation	The increasing of plants by sowing seed.
Transplanting	To carefully uproot and replant a growing plant in another position.
True Leaf	The first leaf produced by a seedling that has the arrangement and appearance typical of that particular plant.

HINTS AND TIPS FOR GROWING PLANTS FROM SEED INDOORS

- Always use fresh, sterile compost
- Multi-purpose compost is ideal providing you remove any large lumps by sieving
- Don't use compost which has been stored outdoors. Bring indoors in order to warm it up
- Avoid using the compost from your compost heap as it may contain pests and diseases
- Any plastic container can be used providing it has holes for drainage
- Make sure that containers are clean. Clean pots and trays stored over winter in the greenhouse as they can harbour pests and disease
- Yogurt pots and pre-packed food containers are ideal
- Toilet roll and kitchen roll cardboard tubes can be used to sow seeds of peas and similar plants which like a long root run
- Use a pencil to write on plant labels in order that they can be reused by erasing the writing
- Plastic bottles cut to size can be used over the container to act as a propagator cover
- Trays and pots can be placed inside freezer bags to provide the humidity required for germination
- A warm window ledge out of direct sun is ideal for starting seeds off
- The top of kitchen units or bedroom units are also ideal spots
- Remove cover as soon as seedlings begin to emerge
- Keep seedlings moist by spraying with a trigger sprayer
- When pricking out the resulting seedlings always hold by a leaf, never by the stem
- Don't over water the seedlings
- When moving seedlings to the greenhouse, there is no need to heat the whole greenhouse
- A small paraffin heater is ideal and an area can be sectioned off by using lightweight plant fleece
- Gently wafting a sheet of paper over the seedlings every day or two will simulate the wind and help strengthen the stems of the plants