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## Seed Starting 101

**I**f you have the time and the inclination, starting your own plants from seed can be immensely satisfying. Whether you grow flowers or vegetables, raising something from a tiny speck to a fruiting, flowering, spectacle is a reminder of nature's miracles.

Not only can growing your own plants from seed be economical, especially if you want a whole field of flowers or bushels of tomatoes. In some cases, especially with vegetables, starting from seed is the only way to grow unusual or rare varieties. Here are some basic tips to get you started:

1. Decide whether you want to start seeds in wide pots or trays and transplant the individual seedlings to their own pots at a later stage, or sow a few seeds in individual cells or pots, thinning the seedlings by snipping the extras off.
2. Round up your containers. You can use individual pots or multi-celled seed starting flats. Plastic pots are better than clay pots, as they help the soil retain moisture better.
3. If you are reusing old pots, wash them in hot, soapy water and disinfect them by rinsing them in a dilute solution of bleach and water (ask us about proportion).
4. Mix seed starting mix (a special type of potting soil) in a bucket with enough water to make it as moist as a wrung-out sponge.
5. Fill the pot most of the way with soil, tapping it on your work surface to settle the soil and work out any air pockets.
6. Drop or sprinkle seeds onto the soil surface, spacing them as evenly as possible.
7. Lightly and evenly sprinkle soil over the seeds, per each seed packet instruction.
8. To make sure that the seeds are in direct contact with the moist soil (essential for germination), use the bottom of a glass or another pot to gently tamp down on the surface.
9. If you are using a heat mat, place the pots, singly or in trays, on top of it. Alternatively, you can place your pots in a warm location. Most seeds germinate best at temperatures of 65-75 degrees.
10. To help keep the seeds and soil evenly moist, cover each pot with plastic wrap and secure with a rubber band, or place the pots in a tray covered with a plastic mini-greenhouse top.
11. Check the pots daily for moisture and germination. If the soil surface gets dry, remoisten it with a gentle spritz from a squirt bottle. For more intensive watering, place the pot in a tray or basin with a few inches of warm water. The soil will act like a wick to draw the moisture up. Do not overhead/top water.

12. As soon as the seeds begin to sprout, remove the plastic wrap or cover, as good air circulation is very important to your young plants. Seedlings don't need to be as warm as seeds, so move them off the heat mat or away from the heater.
13. Seedlings need 12-16 hours of light each day to thrive. If you have only a few pots or trays and a sunny, south-facing window, great. Otherwise, you'll need ordinary fluorescent shop lights ( 1 warm, 1 cool 40-watt bulbs are good). Your setup can be basic or elaborate, but make sure you can either raise and lower the lights or the plants. The lights must be close enough (i.e. a few inches) that the seedlings don't stretch and grow leggy, but not so close (i.e. touching) that the leaves burn.
14. For stronger, stockier seedlings, gently brush your hands over them daily or fan them with a piece of cardboard. If you are using the sunny window method, turn the pots or tray one-quarter turn each day.
15. Start fertilizing once the seedlings develop their first set of *true* leaves (these look different than the *very first* two leaves, which are the seed leaves). Give them a weekly dose of half-strength summer liquid fertilizer.
16. Don't rudely thrust your tender seedlings out into the "real world." Gradually acclimate them to direct sun and changing temperatures. One week before you want to plant them in the garden, begin setting your seedlings outside for increasing amounts of time each day (assuming the weather is fair). Start with a shady, sheltered spot, working up to morning, then afternoon sun.
17. Once your seedlings are hardened off, plant them outside and congratulate yourself on a job well done!

## Seed-Starting Shopping List

### Necessary Supplies

- 1 Seeds
- 1 Seed-starting mix
- 1 Pots
- 1 Trays w/ lids
- 1 Fertilizer
- 1 Labels or tags

### Optional Supplies

- 1 Heat mat
- 1 Tube lights
- 1 Plastic wrap and rubber bands or mini greenhouse cover(s)
- 1 Greenhouse!