

Seed Starting Techniques

Fortunately, the majority of commonly grown garden vegetables, herbs, and flowers are easily grown by simply sowing them in a **good quality, loose, sterile potting or seed starting mix** and then waiting for the weather to warm enough to plant them outdoors. Seeds should be planted at a depth equal to 2-4 times its diameter. The exceptions are seeds that are extremely fine or need light to germinate, such as the seeds of begonia, impatiens and snapdragons.

Germination can be hurried a bit for some warmth-loving plants if they are provided bottom heat. These include tomatoes, peppers, and eggplants. Some cool weather crops germinate best at room temperature, such as most greens, lettuce, celery, and members of the cabbage family.

Containers for seed starting



Peat cubes. Plantable cubes of peat moss are both pot and soil. Some contain nutrients, too.

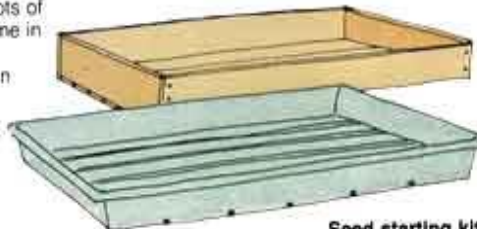
Peat pots. Plantable pots of pressed peat moss come in several sizes; round or square; individually or in strips of 6 or 12.



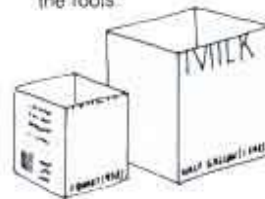
Jiffy-7 pellets. Improved peat cubes. Small and dry until ready to use; expand to 2" when dampened. They're reinforced with plastic netting.

Soil mixes. Sterilized packaged potting soil is a scientifically formulated medium that provides proper water retention and drainage for your new plants. Having strong, healthy seedlings with no insects and no damping-off or other diseases is well worth the extra cost.

Flats. New plastic flats and the old-fashioned wood ones are still used extensively for seed starting.



Milk cartons. Quart or half-gallons, when cut about 3" high, make excellent pots for seed starting. Tear the carton from soil ball when transplanting to avoid disturbing the roots.



Seed starting kits. All the equipment you need to start seeds is available in kit form from several manufacturers. Some include a warming cable or plastic greenhouse.



Certain seeds (peas, beans, nasturtiums, and parsley) benefit from soaking for up to 24 hours before planting, either in water or in moistened towels. Plant them immediately after soaking.

Some seeds (examples: morning glories, asparagus, lupines, tree seeds) have hard coats and will germinate faster if the seed coat is lightly nicked in a process called scarification. Use a fine file, sandpaper, or nail clipper to scratch an opening into the seed coat. Take care not to injure the internal portion of the seed and avoid nicking the edges where the first root will emerge.

Many seeds of perennials require a cold, moist period of a month or two before they germinate to simulate winter. Seeds can be refrigerated or frozen in pots or baggies of soil, then planted the next spring. You can also plant the seeds in a pot and leave them in a protected place outdoors for the winter, or plant them directly in the ground and mark the spot.