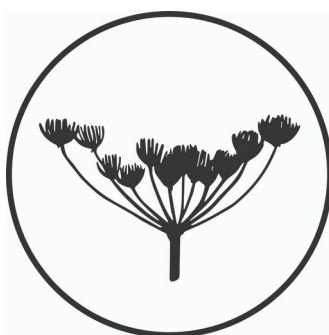


HOW TO SOW YOUR SEEDS

A guide to help you start off an abundant
garden



There is nothing more satisfying than sowing seeds, watching them grow, and then harvesting and sharing your crops with friends and family. The saying 'You reap what you sow' doesn't come from nowhere; with this guide we will give you some tips on how to start off your seeds successfully so they will grow into strong healthy plants that you can harvest and be nourished from. There are as many ways to sow seeds as there are gardeners in the world; here are just a few methods that we have found most effective.



GLOSSARY

- *Cotyledons* or *seed leaves* are the first set of leaves of the plant. They aren't considered 'true leaves' as they're still part of the seed or embryo.
- *True leaves* are the leaves that appear after the seed leaves. They look much more like smaller versions of the leaves of the mature plant.
- A *drill* is a shallow trench made in the soil to sow your seeds into
- *Hardening off* means leaving your plants that were started indoors outside in their pots, containers or modular trays before they are planted into their final place to get used to the change of conditions.





‘DIRECT SOWING’ – SOWING STRAIGHT IN THE GROUND

This is an easy way to propagate many vegetables and flowers, e.g. peas, beans, carrots, radishes, parsnips, beetroot, lettuce, poppies, calendula, etc.

It works best for vegetables that germinate quickly and easily. Generally direct sowing is done between April and September when the soil is warm. Timing is crucial: don't sow outside into the garden too early, as your seeds may rot. You'll know the right moment has arrived when other annuals start appearing in your garden, which depends on your region.

Materials:

- A trowel, hoe, stick or hands to make a ‘drill’
- Sticks, bamboo cane and string to make straight lines
- A watering can with a rose or hose pipe with a spray gun to water the drill

Method:

1. Make a drill into your well prepared seed bed. Use a bamboo cane or string between two sticks if you want to make straight lines. Check sowing recommendation on the back of your seed packet for depth and distance of drills. As a general rule, sow the seeds twice as deep as your seed is big.
2. Water the drill and allow excess water to drain (there should not be a puddle)
3. Pour the seeds from the packet into your hand and carefully spread seeds evenly into the drill – check for seed density on the back of the seed packet
4. Close up the drill and gently firm down the soil to ensure the seeds will have good contact with the soil
5. Label the row and water
6. Once the seedlings have emerged, thin out to appropriate spacing. Keep them weed free and well-watered.



SOWING IN SEED TRAYS

This is a great way to propagate many plants in a small space. and for really small seeds (many flower seeds); e.g. chard, tomatoes, cornflower, tagetes, etc.

Materials:

- Seed trays and pots, containers or module trays for potting on. Make sure they all have holes in the bottom for drainage
- Seed compost
- A sieve
- A flat piece of wood to strike off excess compost from the seed tray and to firm up the compost; you can also use your hands to do this

Method:

1. Sieve the compost into the seed tray, especially if you're sowing delicate seeds. It is best to overfill the tray and then use a flat piece of wood (or your hands) to evenly spread and take off the excess compost. Lift your seed tray and tap it gently onto a hard surface, so that the compost can settle (especially around the corners). Fill up again just above the rim and use your piece of wood (or hands) to strike off to rim level. Gently and evenly firm down the compost (7-10mm below the rim) with a piece of wood, ideally the size of your seed tray or use your flat hand to do this.
2. Sprinkle your seeds thinly onto the compost. Give each seed some space around them (depending on the size of the seed)
3. Cover your seeds with another thin layer of (sieved) compost. Some seeds require light to germinate and won't need covering (e.g. basil or lettuce), others germinate only in the dark; it really depends on the seed. As a general rule, sow the seeds twice as deep as your seed is big.
4. Label your tray, water gently using a rose on the watering can or spray gun on the hose and place in a sunny and warm spot
5. Once the cotyledons have appeared and before true leaves come out, transplant seedlings into larger containers, this is known as 'pricking out'. It is a critical moment in a seedling's life as the little plant is delicate and damage to roots and leaves should be prevented. The seedling should be carefully eased out of the soil using a thin wooden or plastic implement (experts would use a widger but a pencil, plant label, little stick will do the job) and lifted gently by their leaves (not by the stem). Make a hole in your compost, place the seedling with its roots into the hole and gently firm up the compost around it. If the seedlings are leggy, bury them slightly deeper (up to the pair of leaves) in their new pot. Look at our Youtube video "How to prick out seedlings" to get more detailed instructions.
6. Once the weather permits and your plants are large enough to be moved outside, they will need 'hardening off'. Plants might need taking inside during the night if it will be particularly cold.
7. Plant out your seedlings with recommended spacing into a well prepared bed and give them a good watering





SOWING IN POTS, CONTAINERS, MODULAR TRAYS

Seeds sown into pots, containers or modular plug trays can be left without pricking out until their roots fill the compost of your container. It's a way to start off your plants before you can direct sow outside. You can multi-sow some seeds, for example basil, onions, leeks, and beetroots. Cucumbers, courgettes, squashes, sunflowers as well as peas and beans also benefit from being grown in smallish pots. Consider biodegradable pots and try out jiffy trays that prevent root disturbance when planting out.

Material:

- Small pots (7-9cm in diameter), or module trays. You can also get creative here: the cardboard of an empty toilet roll is a popular option or milk cartons with the tops cut off make great containers as well.
- Seed compost

Method:

1. Fill your pots, containers or module trays with compost. Make sure the density is firm but not compacted to ensure ideal water distribution and root growth. You can use a similar technique as for filling seed trays (see above).
2. Sow your seeds. If your seeds are 'old' and you're not sure how well they're going to germinate, sow two seeds. If both sprout you can pinch off the smaller/less vigorous one (pinch out rather than separate, as that may cause too much of a root disturbance for the one you want to keep)
3. Cover lightly with compost. As a general rule, sow the seeds twice as deep as your seed is large.
4. Label
5. Water with a watering can with a fine rose
6. Once the weather permits and your plants are large enough to be moved outside, they will need hardening off.
7. Plant your seedlings with recommended spacing into a prepared bed and give them a good watering.

OUR HOT SOWING TIPS AND TRICKS

1. Find alternatives to pots made from plastic. There are a lot of new-style growing containers out there these days. Also, there is an endless amount of used pots, containers, tools, gardening materials in the world that aren't in use, so often no need to buy things new. You can rummage in car boot sales, ask friends, family and neighbours, or [freecycle.org](https://www.freecycle.org) is a good website where people offer items they do not want anymore. Get creative!
2. Use peat-free growing media if possible.
3. Never let your compost dry out fully, as it will be really hard to get damp again.
4. If you want to start your tomatoes, peppers and aubergines really early, make sure they are kept in a nice warm place with a constant temperature (18-20°C), you might want to consider getting a propagator and an LED grow light.
5. Cover your trays, pots and containers with clear polythene or a sheet of glass to keep the moisture and warmth in, and take it off when seedlings emerge to allow ventilation.
6. If sowing your seeds on hot summer days, cover them with shade netting of some kind.
7. Water seeds as needed! But don't let them sit in water, as damping off (rotting) of young seedlings can be a problem, especially water sensitive plants like peppers and chillies.



SOW, GROW, EAT AND ENJOY!

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