

Seed Starting Tips

From the experts at Allisonville Nursery

Tips & Tricks



Don't start plants too soon. Check seed packages for proper timing. The last frost date for central Indiana is May 10th.

Write the plant names on labels in advance, so you can insert a label into each pot as soon as you sow the seeds.

To get the seeds out one at a time, fold a sharp crease in the seed packet, then shake the packet so the seeds line up in the crease.

Containers

Many different types of containers from commercial trays and inserts to yogurt cups are suitable for seed-starting provided they have drainage holes. Used containers must be sterilized by rinsing them in a solution of one part chlorine bleach to 10 parts water.

Soil Mix

Always start with a sterile germinating mix. DO NOT use garden soil which harbors disease organisms. Moisten mix with room temperature water prior to filling containers. Fill containers and gently tamp soil mix down. As a rule of thumb, plant seeds at a depth 2-3 times their diameter.

Planting

Very fine seeds such as petunia or begonia should be sown on the surface. Moisten the surface after planting with a fine mist. Large-seeded vegetables that resent transplanting, such as cucumber, cantaloupe and watermelon should be planted directly into peat pots.

Some seeds have specific light or dark requirements for germination. Sow seeds that require light such as dill, lettuce and impatiens on top of the soil. Cover seeds of cabbage, cauliflower, parsley and spinach for germination.

Cover containers with clear plastic bags and place in a warm location for germination. DON'T place covered containers in direct sunlight. Check daily for germination.

Scarification is nicking or roughing up a hard seed coat with sandpaper

Special Techniques

to enable the germination shoot to emerge. Seeds that benefit include lupine, moonflower and morning glory.

Stratification mimics the cold/moist condition of winter. Place seeds between layers of moist soil mix, cover and refrigerate for several weeks. Purple coneflower, columbine and violas benefit from this process.

Growing Seedlings

Light. Seedlings must receive bright light promptly after germination. Remove cover and place in a bright south window or under fluorescent lights. Ordinary shop lights with 40 watt bulbs work great. Place seedlings 2 inches from the tubes and keep lights on 14 to 16 hours each day.

Temperature. Most annual plants and vegetables prefer night temperatures between 60 and 65 degrees. Cool-season vegetable crops (cabbage, broccoli) and flowers (pansies, snapdragons) prefer night temperatures no higher than 55 degrees. An unused bedroom or basement is suitable. Day temperatures may run 10 degrees higher.

Fertilization. Do not fertilize seedlings until they have developed their first set of true leaves. Use a soluble house plant fertilizer at 1/4 to 1/2 the recommended strength.

Thinning and Transplanting. After seedlings have developed their first set of true leaves, thin them to one per individual container by cutting off extras with a scissors. Extra seedlings may also be transplanted to other containers. Handle them carefully by the seed or cotyledon leaves, not the delicate stem.

A few annuals and herbs – alyssum, lobelia, chives, dill, and parsley – don't mind being crowded and may be transplanted into the garden as a clump.

Moving Plants Outdoors

Moving Plants Outdoors

Plants that have been growing indoors can't be planted abruptly into the garden without danger of injury. They must be "hardened" off prior to planting outdoors. Start two weeks ahead of desired planting date. When first put outdoors place plants in the shade, then gradually move into the sunlight for short periods each day. Do not put tender seedlings outdoors on windy days or when temperatures are below 45 degrees.



Tips & Tricks

Presoak large seeds such as bean and pea or those with hard seed coats such as lupine and morning glory.

Store water/fertilizer solution for seedlings in clean one gallon milk jugs.

Prevention is the best way to control pests and diseases. Avoid high temperatures, poor light or excess moisture.

Most annual flowers respond to pinching, which encourages side branching.

If kept cool and dry, seeds will last for several years. Store seed packets in a ziplock bag in the back of your refrigerator.