

## Planning for Seed Starting

Spring will be here before we know it, even this year. It's time to think about what we want to grow this year, perhaps different perennial varieties, maybe new and interesting annuals, or perhaps growing plants from seed.

If you haven't grown annuals or vegetables from seed in the past, or perhaps the project wasn't successful, you probably have lots of questions. There are many how-to books and guides for seed growing; one of the very best is [From Seed to Bloom](#) by Eileen Powell. The Fine Gardening website has many useful articles.

Seeds started outdoors require much less care and attention than those started indoors. I am going to concentrate on indoor growing and the factors you should think about before picking plant varieties and sowing the seeds. Growing plants from seed can be a very rewarding experience but if you haven't thought about the supplies you will need and the how-to's it could be frustrating. It doesn't have to be complicated or expensive but it does require some planning. Knowing the answers to these questions will help you decide what types of plants would be the most suitable for you to grow and determine how successful you will be.

1. Where are you going to set up your grow op? Many people immediately think basement, it's out of the way and has space available, it may not be the best choice if it is not somewhere you spend time; you aren't looking at it all the time and may not notice wilting seedlings or other problems. I grow seeds in the master bedroom where I can be sure of seeing them several times a day.
2. Do you have a suitable fixture or shelving for pots or trays? There are many very expensive shelving systems with grow lights, heat mats etc, they really are not necessary. A very basic utility shelving unit works well.
3. Do you have fluorescent fixtures or sunny windowsills? Standard fluorescents work well and are much cheaper than grow lights; cool white tubes will be fine. Hang the fixtures from the shelves or support them on pieces of dowel. Windowsills (if your house has them) are not the best choice, they don't get as much light as we think and are often quite cold at night.



4. What will you use for containers? Most seeds need warmth and moisture to germinate so keeping the seeds warm and moist makes a big difference to your germination rate. Once again there are many options, from self-watering containers at \$24.50 each, to used pots for free. You can buy clear plastic domes to put over plastic flats, put pots into plastic bags or, my favourite, use the clear plastic clamshells that salads, fruit or some baked goods come in, the lid is attached and each container will hold up to about 10 seedlings.

5. What soil will you use? My choice - use Jiffy 7 expandable peat pellets, you can plant one or more seeds per pellet and if you need to thin the seedlings just cut the unwanted ones down with scissors. If using pots a soilless mix is best, there are several good brands, look for one that is specifically designed for seed growing. Instead of transplanting seedlings I move the peat pellet into a pot filled with soil; it's much easier for me and the seedling is not disturbed.
6. How will you water the seedlings? A large watering can is fine, two are better. Don't use water straight from the tap, it's too cold, refill your watering cans after every use so the water has time to warm up before the next watering.
7. How many weeks do you want to spend nurturing your seedlings? There is a lot of information on seed packets so read them carefully. They will tell you when to plant the seeds, and when they can be planted outside. Do the seeds need light or darkness to germinate? How deep and far apart should the seeds be planted? What care do the young seedlings require? Some annuals for example petunias must be started in January if you want flowers in May, do you want to spend close to 5 months looking after annuals that are easily available and can be bought quite cheaply. Remember as with all babies you can't go away without arranging a babysitter.
8. How many plants do you want to grow? A small number of seedlings, maybe a flat can fit easily on top of the fridge or on a kitchen counter with some extra light provided, more than that requires a designated growing area.
9. How much money do you want to spend on this project? You could buy a 3 tiered fixture with lights for about \$300 to grow 12 tomato plants but it makes no sense. There are lots of ways to grow your own plants without spending a lot of money, some are listed above, and for more tips use the internet.

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