

Why start your own seedlings?

Save Money

- A pack of lettuce seeds costs less than a single head of lettuce. And a pack of seeds planted successively produces lettuce most of the summer.
- You can re-use the majority of the Seedling Starter Supplies every year — sustainability!

More Control

- You choose exactly what types of fertilizers and pesticides go into your food and flowers because . . . well, it's all in your hands.
- A seed rack offers considerably more variety than in starters found in garden centers.

Health & Personal Satisfaction

- Freshly picked vegetables straight from your garden are more healthy and more flavorful.
- **Not only** do you get a greater appreciation in growing your own food . . .
Not only do you get bragging right to your co-workers, friends, & family . . .
Not only can you get some recommended exercise (research shows thirty minutes of gardening per day will help increase flexibility; strengthen joints; decrease blood pressure and cholesterol levels; lower your risk for diabetes; and slow osteoporosis.) . . .
Not only can you get a better connection to the earth . . . **BUT** it is FUN!

Check out these sites.

http://seattlepi.nwsource.com/nwgardens/348438_wingate24.html

<http://www.motherearthnews.com/Organic-Gardening/2001-12-01/Start-Seeds-Indoors.aspx>

http://www.inthegardenonline.com/techniques_startingseedsB21.htm

<http://gardening.about.com/od/gardenprimer/a/SeedStarting.htm>

<http://www.humeseeds.com/fromseed.htm>

<http://www.humeseeds.com/indoor.htm>

<http://www.organicgardening.com/learn-and-grow/starting-seeds>

Want more detail?



Simple Seedling Starting

Start your own seedlings and be sure your plants are raised organically from the beginning.

- Supply List
- How-to Guideliness
- Websites to reference

Seedling Starter Supplies

❑ Containers

Any container 2" to 3" deep with drainage holes will work. Small pots for initial planting and 2" to 4" pots for repotting at 4 to 8 weeks.

❑ Holding tray

A tray that will hold your seedling containers & water.

❑ Watering device

A watering can is good; a spray bottle to mist is useful.

❑ Grower's mix (aka Seed Starters mix)

A lighter than regular soil mix allows seedlings to germinate (emerge) easier

❑ Seeds

Always read seed package for specific instructions.

Surefire vegetables/herbs include basil, green beans, chives, brussel sprouts, cabbage, lettuce, onions, pumpkins, squash, and tomatoes. Reliable annual flowers are alyssum, cosmos, marigolds, and zinnias. Reliable perennials include Shasta daisies, columbines, and hollyhocks.

❑ Labels

Trays will shift around, plants will get mixed up, memories will fail. Make your life easier — label.

❑ Light source

A shop fluorescent bulb lighting system works good. Use one cool bulb and one warm bulb for the optimal light.

❑ Light timer (optional, but really helpful)

❑ Chains & Hooks (optional, but really helpful)

❑ Plant Heating Mat (optional)

❑ Plastic bag or plastic sheeting (optional)

Seedling Starter Guidelines

Growing Area location

A spare bedroom, basement, or sun porch make a good growing area. Aim for a room temperature of 60° to 75°. If your room is on the cold side, you can use a plant heating pad if you wish, but only use it until the sprouts appear. *Caution:* Only use heating mats certified for seed starting use. If your growing area is consistently between 60° to 75°, this mat may be an extravagance.

Prepping & Choosing

Start with something like a Mini Greenhouse Seed Starter Tray — it provides a planting flat, a holding tray, and a clear dome. Previously used planting flats and containers should be disinfected with 1 part bleach/10 parts water.

When choosing what to plant, remember some seeds produce better when sown directly in the soil once it warms up. Other seeds require soaking or chilling before planting. **Always** read the back of the seed envelope for details.

Planting

First, lightly moisten your Seed Starter mix. Fill containers about two-thirds full and tap the container to settle the potting mix. Gently pat firm. Drop seeds & cover to a depth specified on the seed package. Small seeds can be sprinkled lightly. Count out larger seeds and plant with at least three seeds per container (not all seeds will germinate and you will be thinning later). Label your plants as you plant the seeds (Labelling makes a gardener's life easier). Mist, sprinkle with water, or set containers into a tray with some water in the bottom so the mix wicks up the moisture from below. **Do NOT let mix get soggy.**

You can loosely cover the flats or pots with plastic wrap or a dome to keep in some humidity. The plastic should NOT be air tight or you will promote mildew — which is not good. If you use a plastic bag or plastic sheet, cut up straws, toothpicks, or bamboo skewers can help keep the plastic up off the soil.

When things sprout

At the first signs of seedlings, take off plastic, remove any

heating mats, and expose to fluorescent shop lights. Here in Seattle we don't get the 12 to 18 hours of daylight these seedlings need. Even with a fully southern, bright sunny window, set up a fluorescent bulb lighting system. **You need to provide 12 to 18 hours of light.** Suspend the lights no more than two inches above the plants. As the plants grow, be sure to move the lights up so the plants do NOT touch the bulbs (they will burn!). A hook-n-chain system can help with this. Turn the planting trays every other day or so keeps the plants from leaning too much and getting all spindly — which is not good. If you can remember to switch the lights on and off, a light timer is an indulgence. For most of us, it is the best thing ever.

Water consistently. Don't let your seedlings dry out, but don't let them be soggy either. Try to use room temperature to lukewarm water. Begin to fertilize your seedlings once they get their first "True leaves." ("True leaves" emerge after the cute, round cotyledon leaves.) If you can, a couple times a day, lightly ruffle seedlings that have grown their true leaves — it

helps them grow strong. Apply the first dose of fertilizer at half the recommended strength. Then fertilize at two-week intervals with the dilution recommended by the manufacturer.

Re-potting

As seedlings outgrow their containers or get crowded, thin out the weak ones by snipping them off, then carefully repot them into larger containers with a mix that includes compost. Pulling them up can disturb the roots of the seedling you intend to keep.

Hardening off

For a week or two before the plants go outside, start acclimating them. On a warm day move the plants to a shady spot for increasing lengths of time. Gradually increase the amount of time they spend outside and the amount of sunlight they receive. Bring them in or cover them if the temperature dips.

Leave the plants outside the night before transplanting. Water seedlings well before and after transplanting. Try to transplant on a cloudy day if possible.