



RECREATION AT HOME

Get Growing - Start Your Vegetable Seeds Indoors

Vegetables such as tomatoes, eggplants, and peppers require a longer growing season. In order to accomplish this, most gardeners start their seeds for this variety of vegetables indoors in the spring. Starting your own seeds indoors is much less expensive than purchasing plants and it can also result in a much better season of growing overall. Not to mention, it's fun and rewarding!

Tips to successfully starting your seeds indoors:

Be sure to purchase your seeds from a reliable source

Higher quality fresh seeds will have a better germination period and will sprout up better in the end. The better the head-start, the more nutritious your vegetables will be.

Add seed-starting mix to pot

Seed-starting mixes do not contain any actual soil, but they provide ideal conditions for sprouting seeds. They also provide a good balance of drainage and water-holding capacity, and they minimize problems with disease on vulnerable seedlings. If possible, do not use garden soil to start seeds indoors; it generally does not drain well and may contain plant disease spores.

Ensure that your containers have drainage holes

For the containers, you can re-use and recycle – for example, empty yogurt containers work great — but be sure to poke little holes in the bottom for drainage, so that your seeds are not over-watered, this can lead to rot. Plastic six-packs and flats make for good pods as well and can be re-used year after year. Biodegradable pots work well too!

Be sure to plant your seeds at the proper depth

Refer to the seed packet for proper planting depth. Be careful not to plant the seed any deeper than the packet suggest. The rule of thumb is to plant the seed two-to-three times as deep as the seed is wide. For example, tiny seeds should be barely even covered by soil mix, but larger seeds, like beans should be sown down about an inch deep into the soil. If you sow seeds too deeply, they won't have enough stored energy to make it to the surface. Plant extra seeds, because it is likely not all of them will germinate anyways; you can thin out the extra ones later.

Once your seeds are sown, set the containers in a warm location

After your seeds have been sown, set your pods in a warm spot to start the germination process. On top of the refrigerator or near a radiator are usually good spots – just be sure to keep them at a safe distance. Check your pots every day for signs of growth!

Keep your seed-starting soil mix moist

Your seedling roots need both air and water to grow. Try to keep the soil mix moist but not saturated with water — think of it as a damp sponge that contains both water and air. Spray bottles work best to keep your soil moist; a few squirts on each pod will help to keep the proper dampness in check.



As soon as your seedlings begin to emerge, place pots in a bright location

A sunny window will do, but additional light from a consistent source like fluorescent lights will give you the best results. If you have access to a fluorescent light, suspend the lights just an inch or two over the tops of the plants.

Best room temperature for seedlings is a cool one

Your seedlings will be sturdier and stockier if you grow them in a room with a temperature in the mid-to-high 60-69 degree range (15-20 degree Celsius). Finding a cooler room in your house or garage, while still maintaining a good light source, will help your seedlings thrive. At higher temperatures, seedlings may get gangly or grow low.

Start fertilizing weekly

Start to fertilize your seedlings with a half-strength fertilizer once your seedlings have one or two sets of leaves grown. Organic fertilizers are a good choice, and they provide a range of nutrients, including micronutrients.



After your seedlings have two sets of leaves, it's time to thin them

You really only want one seedling per pot, so choose the healthiest, strongest-looking seedling to keep. This seedling will be the one you will nurture until it is time to plant outdoors. Simply snip the other seedlings in the same pot off at the soil line and discard them.

Moving your seedlings outdoors.

Keeping your frost zone in mind, move your vegetable seedlings outdoors when the time is right for your area. Refer to the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs website for a detailed map of zones and planting guidelines. <http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/crops/facts/climzoneveg.htm>

