



Growing
from seed

why grow from seed?

Growing from seed is the cheapest and most rewarding method of raising your own plants. Whether you are sowing into seed trays and propagators, or directly into the ground, there is nothing more satisfying than a show of colour and scent, or a crop of tasty fruit and veg, that you have grown yourself.



There are two methods of starting your seeds into growth:

- In a greenhouse/conservatory or indoors on the window sill (usually known as half-hardy seed) potting on and planting out at a later stage when danger of frost has passed.
- Straight out into the ground where they are intended to grow - these varieties are mainly known as hardy annual varieties.

essential information

There are three main plant types whose sowing and flowering patterns are different. All plant varieties fit into one of these three basic groups:

ANNUALS: These are generally the easiest seed to use for quick, easy results. This group grows and crops or flowers in one season only, developing their seed for the next generation. The toughest are the Hardy annuals (HA) which include varieties such as Calendula, Godetia, Nasturtium and most vegetables - sow outdoors. The softer Half-Hardy annuals (HHA) includes Impatiens (Busy Lizzies), Lobelia and vegetables such as tomatoes - start indoors.

BIENNIALS: These seeds are sown in one season to flower the following year. Hardy Biennial varieties (HB) include Canterbury Bell, Foxglove and Wallflower.

PERENNIALS: These live for longer than two years, coming back year after year. Half-Hardy Perennial (HHP) varieties include: Coleus, Carnations, Dahlias and Geraniums. Winter protection is needed. Hardy Perennials (HP) varieties include: Aubrieta, Delphinium, Hollyhock and Aquilegia.

F1 HYBRID SEEDS: This seed is specially bred to get the best qualities from two selected parent plants. These varieties are often more expensive, but produce plants that tend to be more vigorous and more able to resist pest and disease attacks; producing improved flowers and vegetables.

equipment

outdoors

- Garden Rake
- Garden Fork or Spade
- Plant Food
- Watering Can (fine rose)
- String or sand (for marking)



indoors

- Seed tray/ propagator/pots
- Dibber/Widger (or use a teaspoon handle)
- Compost
- Watering Can (fine rose)



Always read the instructions on each packet. They give you the best time, method and place to grow each seed variety.

preparation

indoor sowing for half-hardy seed

- Choose your seed
- Fill a seed tray or other container with a good quality compost leaving around 1cm from the top edge.
- Scatter seed evenly, pressing them gently into the surface. Cover larger seeds with a light covering of compost.
- Lightly water and cover with paper (if light is not a requirement for germination) a propagator lid, or glass to help conserve the moisture. Never let the compost dry out.



transplanting seedlings - giving them room to grow

When the seedlings are large enough to handle, transfer to larger pots or trays of compost to allow them to grow and develop more easily.

Holding by the leaves, carefully ease out the seedlings from their container, using a widger (or a teaspoon handle is fine), placing them into prepared holes.

Gently firm the compost around the roots and stem to leave the (seed) leaves just above the surface). Water lightly and protect from direct sunlight for the first 3-4 days. When the seedlings are established begin to feed weekly.

plant out once all danger of frost has passed

Plant out into required bed or container where you want them to flower. Remember to keep plants watered as required, removing dead flowers to encourage more growth. Feed as required.



outdoor sowing for hardy seeds

- Prepare your seed bed in a sunny spot.
- Dig over and leave until the first weeds appear, pick out these weeds and rake soil to a fine crumbly surface. Digging fertiliser or compost into the weed free soil, before sowing the seeds, will help improve your display.

Sow your seed, this is done one of two ways:

- Broadcast Method: Scatter your seed on the surface in a circular motion, roughly within a half to one metre patch. These can be raked into the surface or covered lightly with compost and pressed down gently.
- Sow in rows: This method is useful with fine seeds such as carrots, in a pre-marked drill (shallow groove). They will need to be thinned later. Larger seed such as beetroot is much easier to handle and can be planted singly along a drill - this reduces the need for thinning out.
- Water the seed beds with a can that has a fine rose. This will prevent the wash effect that would disturb the seeds.



thinning out

When the seedlings are large enough to handle, thin out to the distance shown on the pack. Keep any surplus seedlings to fill the gaps that might appear leaving well spaced plants. Always water transplanted seedlings. Remember to keep plants watered as required, removing dead heads of flowers to encourage more growth. Feed as required.



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easy-to-grow flowers and vegetables

outdoor sowing

Sow flowers in large, bold drifts for real impact, colour theme or go wild with all of the colours of a rainbow. The combinations are down to your own taste and individual favourites.

Whatever you choose, remember to feed and water plants, especially through the dryer months. Removing dead flower heads will encourage plants to flower for longer.

Aster: Sow April-May
Calendula: Sow March-May
Candytuft: Sow March-June
Clarkia: Sow March-May
Cornflower: Sow March-May
Eschscholzia
(California Poppy):
Sow March-May
Godetia: Sow March-May
Gypsophila:
Sow March-May
Night Scented Stock:
Sow March-May
Nasturtium:
Sow March-May
Sunflower:
Sow April-May
Virginian Stock:
Sow March-May
Sweet Peas (can also
be sown under glass in
Autumn):
Sow April-May

The easiest vegetable subjects can be sown directly into their growing positions. Just thin out the seedlings (remember thinnings can be used in salads!) And keep well fed and watered throughout the growing season.

Salad vegetables are ideal as they mature quickly and successive sowings, every two to six weeks or so, will keep you going through the summer season.

Beetroot:
Sow April-July
Leaf Beet:
Sow May-August
Carrot:
Sow March-July
Chives: Sow April-May
Lettuce:
Sow March-September
Leaf Salads:
Sow April-October
(sow at fortnightly intervals)
Marrows & Courgettes:
Sow April-May
Spring Onion:
Sow March-July
Rocket:
Sow April-June
Radish:
Sow March-September
Parsnip: Sow March-April
Turnip: Sow April-August



the vegetable plot

seed bed - Initially sow into prepared nursery bed before thinning and planting out in final positions.

why a seed bed?

Some young seedlings need less space than the mature plant, so less of the plot need be committed to a crop until it is really necessary.

A crop may be started off in the seed bed while its final position has another crop waiting to be harvested. Vegetables best suited to seed bed raising are:

Cabbage: Sow April-June (Winter & Savoy varieties): July-August (Spring varieties)

Broccoli: Sow April-May

Cauliflower: Sow March-May

Brussels Sprouts:

Sow March-April

Onions : Sow March-April

Leek: Sow March-April

Sweetcorn: Sow May



under glass

Other species are better kept in a warmer, protected environment.

Some can be planted out after starting under glass (peppers, some tomatoes) others should remain there, these include:

Cucumber:

Sow Feb-May

Melon:

Sow Feb-May

Chillies: Sow Feb-April

Sweet Pepper:

Sow Feb-April

Tomato: Jan-April (hardy varieties can move outside May/June)



containers and baskets

You can achieve a glorious display on your patio using a variety of containers. Anything from stone urns and wheelbarrows to old boots and tin cans can hold plants, so long as they have good drainage; placing small stones or broken pots in the bottom of your container will help. Then fill with good quality compost and plant up as required once all danger of frost has passed.

Try planting small containers with a single variety and then group a number of containers together for a stunning display. Items such as Petunias, Impatiens, Dwarf Rudbeckias and Geraniums give pots of colour.

For larger containers plant trailing items such as Lobelia Cascade around the edge of the container. Fill the central area with varieties such as Marigolds, Asters, Nemesias and dwarf Sweet Peas. Fill any gaps with 'spreading' plants such as Alyssum.

Window Boxes can be planted up in the same way. Dwarf Nasturtiums can give a great display and are edible, herbs make a great window box idea or the traditional Geraniums.

Don't forget to water containers regularly especially during hot weather. Apply a liquid fertiliser weekly or add a slow release fertiliser to the compost along with water retaining gel granules. Remove any dead heads to prolong flowering period.



hanging baskets

Create a spectacular display easily and economically with plants grown from seed. It is simple using subjects such as trailing Lobelias, Ivy Leaved Geraniums, Surfinias, and even trailing varieties of Sweet Pea and Nasturtium.

Once all danger of frost has passed, you can begin to plant up your seed raised plants into hanging baskets.

Stand the basket on a large plant pot or bucket, so that the bottom of the basket sits just inside, you can then plant them up more easily.

Line your basket with moss or an alternative basket liner and part fill with a good quality compost.

Begin by planting trailing varieties such as the Lobelias through the sides of the basket (penetrating the liner) and around the top edge.

Once this is done, fill the remaining space with compost and plant up the top of the basket.

Plant larger upright varieties such as Geraniums, Petunias and pansies in the centre of the basket. Surrounding these, plant smaller spreading varieties such as Impatiens, Limnanthes and dwarf Nasturtiums. Leave a dip in the centre of the compost to concentrate moisture down into the basket when watered.

Many plants benefit from 'stopping' to produce a bushy habit. This can be done about a week after planting.

Give the baskets time to establish, placing them in a sheltered spot for a few weeks before moving them out on display. Remember to keep fed and watered and remove any dead flower heads.



handy hints and money saving tips

Bean, Sweet Pea and Ipomoea seeds can be soaked overnight and placed on damp cotton wool or blotting paper to shoot. This should speed up the germination time.



A seed tray can be as simple as a margarine container - just remember to punch holes for drainage.

A clear plastic bag placed over a seed tray or pot helps the seed germinate like a mini-greenhouse. Do not allow condensation build up inside the bag as this can lead to the compost being too wet.

Growing 'under glass' can mean a warm, well lit, frost-free windowsill, not just a greenhouse.



In some flower seed mixtures, more unusual colours often mature more slowly than others so be sure to transplant all seedlings.

When re-potting seedlings hold each one by the seed leaves. This avoids damaging the delicate stems.

You can always use spare seedlings of lettuce or onion, for example, in salads.



Seed swap with others. If you each grow a different variety you can exchange the seedlings.

Lollipop sticks make cheap and sturdy seed labels.

Store spare seeds in a sealed container with a few grains of rice to keep them dry.