

Seed Starting Guide

Garden911.net

From Seed to Garden - your quick-start reference

GETTING STARTED

1. Choose a clean container with drainage holes.
2. Fill with seed-starting mix (not garden soil).
3. Moisten mix before sowing - should feel like a wrung-out sponge.
4. Sow seeds at depth shown on packet (usually 2x seed diameter).
5. Label immediately with variety name & sow date.
6. Some seeds need light to germinate - press these firmly on the surface; do not bury them.
7. Use a heat mat if possible. Cold, wet soil slows germination and increases the risk of seed rot.
8. Cover with a clear dome or plastic wrap to hold humidity.
9. Place in a warm spot (65-75 F) until germination.

DEPTH & TIMING CHEAT SHEET

Tomatoes / Peppers	1/4" deep	6-8 wks before last frost
Lettuce / Spinach	1/8" deep	4-6 wks before last frost
Basil / Parsley	1/8" deep	6-8 wks before last frost
Squash / Cucumbers	1/2-1" deep	3-4 wks before last frost
Brassicas (broccoli etc.)	1/4" deep	6-8 wks before last frost
Sunflowers / Zinnias	1/2" deep	2-4 wks before last frost
Marigolds	1/8" deep	4-6 wks before last frost

SEEDLING CARE

- Light:** Seedlings need 14-16 hrs/day. A grow light 2-4" above seedlings works best.
- Water:** Water from the bottom until mix is moist. Keep soil consistently moist, not wet.
- Fertilize:** **DO NOT fertilize germinating seeds. Wait until the first true leaves appear before fertilizing.**

HARDENING OFF (1-2 WEEKS BEFORE TRANSPLANT)

- Day 1-2:** Set outdoors in shade for 1-2 hrs. Bring in before dark.
- Day 3-4:** Increase to 3-4 hrs; introduce brief sun exposure.
- Day 5-7:** Half a day outside, including direct morning sun.
- Day 8-10:** Full day outside; protect from strong wind & frost.
- Day 11+:** Leave out overnight once nights stay above 50 F.

COMMON PROBLEMS & FIXES

- Leggy seedlings** More light, lower lamp, thin crowded pots
- Damping off (stem rot)** Improve airflow, reduce watering, use sterile mix
- No germination** Check depth, temp & moisture; some seeds need stratification
- Yellow leaves** Usually overwatering or nutrient deficiency
- Mold on soil surface** Reduce surface moisture; use a fan for airflow