

FALL GARDENING GUIDE

Starting Seeds Indoors



Containers for Starting

There are a multitude of container options for starting seeds from store-bought 6-packs, peat pots and seeding flats to an endless array of homemade and recycled items like egg trays, eggshells, paper pots, soil blocks (small cubes of soil pressed together with a soil-block tool), food containers, or Styrofoam cups with holes for drainage.

Seed-Starting Media

There are a wide variety of soilless growing media on the market for starting seeds and potting plants. A good mix holds moisture but drains well. You can use potting soil to fill most of the container and top that with seed-starting mix for the last inch.



Best Planting Depth

Seeds should be planted at the proper depth for best results. While most seeds germinate best under dark conditions, some seeds need some light to germinate. As a general guide, plant seeds so they are covered with media about 3–4 times their width deep. Very tiny seeds and seeds that need light to germinate should be scattered on the surface of pre-moistened media and lightly pressed in.



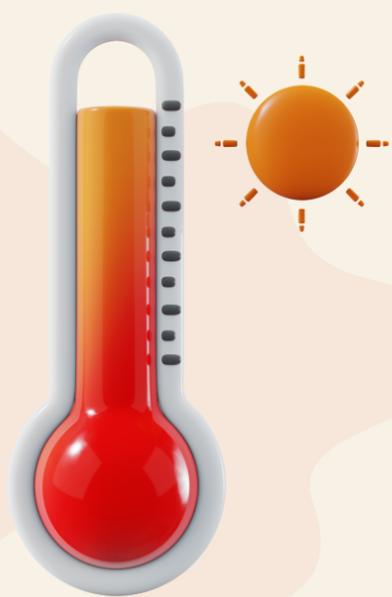
Watering

After planting, water the mix well so the seeds can absorb water. This begins the germination process. Remoisten as needed to prevent the surface from drying out until the seeds are up and growing. During the initial germination phase, take care to not dislodge seeds with a strong stream when you water. Gently apply water with a mister or small sprinkler. Once the seeds and soil are moist, cover them with a plastic cover or clear plastic wrap to help prevent the surface from drying out. When the seedlings have germinated, remove the cover.



Lighting

Good quality light may be the most important of all the requirements for growing a great transplant. Sunlight is best, but often very limited in most home settings, even by a fairly bright window. Without adequate light, your seedlings will be spindly and weak. Artificial lighting is a decent replacement for the few weeks needed to grow a transplant.



Temperature

Most homes are kept at a temperature of 68 to 74 degrees Fahrenheit, but most seeds germinate between 55 and 70 degrees Fahrenheit.

Preparing Transplants for the Outdoors

Your plants, living the easy life indoors, need some help transitioning to the outdoor environment, where chilly night temperatures, wind or hot daytime temps with blazing sun await them.

The process of hardening off involves gradually introducing them to outdoor conditions for a few hours a day, leaving them progressively longer into the cool evenings in the early-spring garden, or gradually transitioning them from bright shade to more direct sun in summer. Given a week or two of this process, they will be much better able to make the transition.



Optimum Light, Temperature and Time

***Light Preference: D—Seeds germinate best in darkness; DL—No light requirements; L—Seeds germinate best in light.**

Vegetables	Light Preference	Optimum Growing Temp (*F)	Weeks from Seed to Transplant
Broccoli, Cabbage, Cauliflower, Collard Greens	D	75	5 to 7
Cucumber, Squash, Watermelon	D	85	2 to 3
Eggplant, Peppers	D	85	7 to 8
Lettuce	L	55	4 to 5
Onions	DL	75	8 to 10
Tomatoes	D	85	5 to 6
Herbs (annual)			
Dill	L	65	5-6
Basil	D	70	4-6
Parsley	D	75	6-8
Chives	L	65	6-8
Cilantro	L	60	1-2
Mint	L	75	2-3
Oregano	L	70	2-3
Rosemary *soak seeds	L	65	6-8
Sage	L	70	2-3
Thyme	L	70	2-3