

Starting Seeds Indoors

It isn't difficult; it's keeping them alive that can be challenging. Avoiding these **common mistakes** will greatly increase your odds for success.

■ Not enough light

Seedlings need a lot of light. Even a South facing window usually won't do. Get some grow lights and keep the lights as close to the seedlings as possible without touching (2 to 3 inches). After your seedlings appear, keep the lights on for 12 to 16 hours a day.

■ Too much or too little water

Cover your container with plastic, until the seeds germinate. Water from the bottom. By letting the plants soak up water through holes in their pots, there is less chance of over watering

■ Starting too soon

Lots of plants don't like the cold and exposing them to chilly air and soil will just stress them out making them more susceptible to pests and disease. Most plants are ready to go outside four to six weeks after you start the seeds.

■ Planting too deep

Planting depth information is usually on the seed packet. If there isn't any information, the rule of thumb is to plant seeds twice or three times as deep as they are wide. If you're not sure, err on the shallow side.

For seeds that need light to germinate, you'll want to make sure that they are in contact with your seed starting medium, but not covered.

■ Tough love

Expose your baby plants to the outside elements gradually.

This means that you put your seedlings outside for more time every day over the course of 6 to ten days, depending on your patience, the temperatures and the fragility of your seedlings.

■ Getting seduced

Don't buy more seeds than you can start, much less nurture into adulthood. Starting modestly is the way to go.

■ Too cool

For seeds to germinate, most must be kept warm 65 to 75°F.

■ Labeling issues

Get popsicle sticks and write the name of the seeds and the day you planted them in permanent ink. Stick it into the soil next to the seeds you've planted or label by row.

www.thespruce.com/growing-seeds-indoors-common-mistakes-847800

Hardening off seedlings and young plants

It takes longer than you think but is worth the trouble! Start the process about two weeks before transplanting outdoors. This will gradually get young plants used to the open air climate and minimize transplanting shock.

Set young plants outside in a shaded, protected area for a few hours a day during

the afternoon. Bring them inside before the temps begin dropping in late afternoon; each day adding a bit more time outdoors. After a few days, let them sit in direct sunshine and gradually increase their time in the sun daily. After a couple of weeks the seedlings should be ready to stay outside until transplanted into the garden. Check the forecast for possible risk of frost.

To reduce transplanting stress, pick a cloudy day or late afternoon, direct sun may cause the plants to wilt at first but they should recover within a day or so. If you're putting newspaper or peat pots directly into the ground, ease open the bottoms of the pots to allow the roots to spread and trim back the pot tops to soil level. Then water and tend and enjoy your plants for the season!