

Starting Your Garden from Seed

1. Why start your own seeds?

- You have a bigger variety of plants to select from. You can start unusual vegetables and flowers that you won't find in local greenhouses.
- You get a jump on enjoying the gardening season. While there's still snow outside, you can get your hands in the soil and watch the seedlings pop up.
- You can be sure that the plants you're growing have not been treated with insecticides that may harm pollinators and other beneficial insects.
- You can also save money, depending on how you go about starting your seeds.
- You will probably wind up with more plants than you need, and they make nice gifts for friends and neighbors. Or you can swap them with friends who also start plants.
- The satisfaction of eating vegetables that you started from a seed.

2. Where do we start? Supplies

- Pots, starting mix, light,

3. What do I plant?

- What you like!

4. What kinds do you plant?

- A. Hybrids - A cross between two parent plants. They are not true to seed
- B. Open Pollinated - True to seed
- C. Heirlooms - Open Pollinated that have been around for at least 50 years

5. Why heirlooms?

- Exceptional taste
- May be more nutritious than newer varieties
- They are open-pollinated, so you can save the seeds from year to year
- They are less uniform than hybrids, which means they don't all ripen at once
- Many heirlooms have wonderful stories of how they came to America

6. After you choose your medium, plant your seeds.

- Plant them about 1/8 to 1/4 inch deep
- Water well.
- Place on heat mat, on top of refrigerator, or under lights. Always keep light no more than 1 inch above trays and plants.
- Keep moist, but not waterlogged. (It is hard to overwater a well-drained pot)
- Cover with plastic cover or plastic wrap

7. When plants start to push up and get about an inch tall, take off plastic cover and place under light. Keep light about 1 inch above the green so they don't reach and get leggy.

When they start growing you can give a weak general purpose water-soluble fertilizer (Fish Emulsion) once a week.

When they get second set of true leaves, you can transplant.

Lift by root ball, not the stem.

Transplant into a larger pot

8. Harden off about 2 weeks before you plant them outside (unless you have a greenhouse). You can also start when the outdoor temperature gets above 64 degrees.

- Start by putting them outside for a few hours in the shade during the warmth of the afternoon, protected from wind.
- Bring them back inside before temperatures start to drop at night.
- Each day, leave the plants out a little longer, and expose them to a little more direct sunshine. If you're not sure how long, err on the side of caution and do less than more. They are pretty hardy.
- By the end of two weeks, unless freezing temperatures are forecast, the seedlings can stay outside in a sunny area until you are ready to transplant them into the garden.
- Commercially produced coldframes/greenhouse are available in many designs.
- Adjust the lid of the coldframes/greenhouse, as needed to protect plants from freezing temperatures.
- Vent the lid a bit farther each day to accustom the plants to wind and cold.

9. Other helpful information

- USDA Cold hardiness Zone 4b
- When it is time to plant, and danger from frost (last frost may 26, first frost September 15) is past, plant in our garden, pots, straw bales, etc.

Resources

Seed Companies

Jung Seed (and Totally Tomatoes)
MIGardener

Seed Savers Exchange

Baker Creek Seeds

Books

- *Complete Idiot's Guide to Seed Starting & Seed Saving*
- *Epic Tomatoes* by Craig LeHoulier
- *Square Foot Gardening* by Mel Bartholomew
- *Straw Bale Gardens* by Joel Karsten
- *The Vegetable Gardener's Container Bible* by Edward Smith
- *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Heirloom Vegetables* by Chris McLaughlin

Websites

<https://learningstore.extension.wisc.edu/>

<https://hort.extension.wisc.edu/>

<https://pddc.wisc.edu/>

<https://insectlab.russell.wisc.edu/>

<https://extension.umn.edu/>

<https://extension.umn.edu/planting-and-growing-guides/starting-seeds-indoors>

<https://extensionpubs.osu.edu/>

<https://extension.purdue.edu/>

Growing a Greener World – Joe Lamp'1

<https://www.growingagreenerworld.com/>

<https://www.growingagreenerworld.com/episode-803-epic-tomatoes/>

<https://joegardener.com/>