

# Successful Seed Starting



Starting plants from seed can be immensely rewarding! Here's the basics:

**When and which seed?** This depends on the time of year. Select your seeds for the warm or cool season. Refer to our Vegetable Planting Dates for North Texas handout for help with edibles at [www.nhg.com](http://www.nhg.com).

**Choose your container.** Whether peat pots, popup pellets, plastic pots or homemade options, make sure your containers have drainage. If you are reusing containers, be sure to disinfect them before planting to avoid the transmission disease.

**Choose your soil.** You can use pre-packaged seed starter or coconut coir mixed with a 50/50 ratio of vermiculite or perlite. After your mixture is ready, thoroughly moisten it. A sprinkling of wormcastings is a great addition to inhibit fungal diseases and contribute to overall seedling health.

**Sow your seeds.** Refer to the seed packet for proper planting depths, and plant with 1- 3 seeds to a cell, pot, or pellet. Seeds planted too shallowly will dry out too soon, and those too deep will not sprout.

**Store unused seeds** in a cool and dry environment. Glass containers, plastic or paper bags can work well, as long as the seeds are perfectly dry. Try using a refrigerator for longer term storage.

**Control temperature.** Warm season veggies such as tomatoes require warmth in order to germinate. Use specially designed seed heat mats to regulate temperatures for these crops. Cool season crops such as lettuces do not need such warmth, therefore for them supplemental heat is not required.

**Light** is required for vigorous growth. 12-16 hours is best. Make sure your light is adjustable to allow for growth. 2-3 inches above your seedlings is optimal to begin with.

**Water.** Initially, your seedlings must not dry out. Your growing medium should stay moist like a damp sponge, but not dripping wet. To water, mist with a fine spray, or water the entire seed tray by immersing it in a larger pan, and allow the pellets or pots to wick up the moisture from beneath.

**Thin seedlings** after approximately 4-6 weeks. The strongest get to survive. Pick away or carefully use scissors to remove smaller, less vigorous sprouts leaving only one sprout per cell or pot.

**Fertilize** using a solution of liquid seaweed or fish emulsion diluted to 1/4 the recommended rate once the first true set of leaves— the second set- emerges. Any heavier feeding is not good for young seedlings.

**Tough love.** 'Harden off' seedlings a week prior to planting in ground. Set them outside in a shaded, sheltered spot during the day. Bring them in before dark, or before rain or heavy winds.

**Transplant** your babies into the garden, or into your choice of a larger container.

**Troubleshooting.** There can be several factors that can cause your seeds not to germinate. Poor quality or old seeds (2-3 years), planting too deeply or not deeply enough, or under- and over-watering. If your seedlings are 'leggy' or spindly, adjust the height of your grow light, as they are reaching for a light source. Consider using a fan for air, and proper watering and drainage techniques to avoid the chances of disease.