



# REFERENCE:

## Seed Starting

**Growing your own ornamentals or vegetables from seed can be immensely rewarding.** This handout will mostly pertain to growing vegetables by seed. First, when to plant and which seed? And, indoors or outdoors? These factors will depend on the time of year, as you'll be choosing your seeds for either 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). If you're starting seeds indoors, you'll also need the right supplies. Consult a Garden Advisor for help.

- **Choose your container.**

Whether peat pots, popup pellets, plastic pots or homemade options, make sure your containers are clean and have drainage. If you are reusing containers, be sure to disinfect them before planting to avoid the transmission of diseases.

- **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.**

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 deeply will not sprout.

- **Store unused seeds.**

Always keep your 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, up to a year or two.

- **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.

*(Continued on reverse)*

- **Provide light.**

Good 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. This produces stronger, stouter plants that will survive transplantation better.

- **Water.**

Initially, *your seedlings must not dry out.* Your growing medium should stay moist like a damp sponge, but not dripping wet. To water, rather than doing it from above, mist with a fine spray. Or, you can 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.**

Thin out your 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.**

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

- **Harden off.**

Tough love, but the young plants must slowly get used to their new surroundings. '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 periods of rain or heavy winds.

- **Transplant.**

Plant your new our transplants into the garden, or into your choice of a larger container.

- **Troubleshoot.**

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 minimize the chances of disease.

- **Get help.**

Seed starting can be quite complicated, especially growing in indoor situations. Speak to one of our Garden Advisors for help in growing your own from seed!