

SEED STARTING TIPS

1. Always use a 'seed starting' soilless mix; it is lighter in texture, plus disease and weed free. Regular potting soil is not suitable, especially for small seeds. It is difficult for a tiny seed to push through and it may harbor pathogens.
2. Use clean, sanitized (10% bleach water) containers to limit pathogens that could be on old pots.
3. Read up on what conditions each particular seed type needs to germinate. Many seeds will germinate more quickly in containers placed on a heat mat controlled by a thermostat. Generally, heat mats come with a pre-set temperature of 70 degrees, but many seeds need temps of 80-95 degrees. Consult temperature table for optimums. Some seeds need light and some need darkness, some seeds take a long time. Put the date and number of days to emergence on the label for reference
4. Don't allow the seedbed to dry out, keep moist at all times. Cover with clear plastic to maintain moisture. Don't germinate seeds in bright sun, this could cook the seeds. A small root that dries out even once may die. Lift the plastic every day to allow some air circulation. A bottle top waterer is useful to keep the soil moist but not soggy. Check for moisture frequently. **DON'T OVER WATER!** Seeds only need moisture and humidity to germinate. If kept soaking wet, seeds may rot, roots may drown or tops may damp off.
5. If you are using a bottom heat source to speed germination of seeds, be sure to move the containers to a cooler area (60 degrees is ideal) in full sun as soon as the seedlings have emerged. For growing on after germination, a 55 to 70 degree range is perfect. You may need supplemental light.
6. Water seedlings with warm water to prevent shock, this is especially important for heat lovers like tomatoes and peppers. Once the plants show a true leaf you can start using some liquid fertilizer but be cautious, dilute it a little if the NPK is high. Water from the bottom by setting the pots in a shallow pan of water. Keeping the moisture level 'right' is a balancing act that requires you to be vigilant especially when the growing conditions are cold and damp.
7. If your seedlings are getting 'leggy', long and lanky, there are three probable causes; not enough sun/bright light, overly warm growing conditions or too much nitrogen. Frequently it is some combination of these factors. The best way I've found to manage this once plants are getting leggy is to move them to a much cooler position with very bright light. A cold frame or cloche may be a good choice. If you think too much fertilizer is the problem, re-pot in fresh new soil.
8. If your seedlings are not bright green, or a color typical of the particular variety, they could be hungry or cold. Try a fairly balanced liquid fertilizer with micronutrients and move them to a warm, bright place. Be patient, uptake of nutrients does not happen overnight, it may take a week or more to see results.
9. If all else fails and your seedlings are not growing and do not look happy, my remedy is to dig them up and check the roots; they may not be healthy. If the roots look viable repot plants in fresh new soil. Water in lightly with commercial transplant solution. Place in a warm spot with bright indirect light to recover.

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