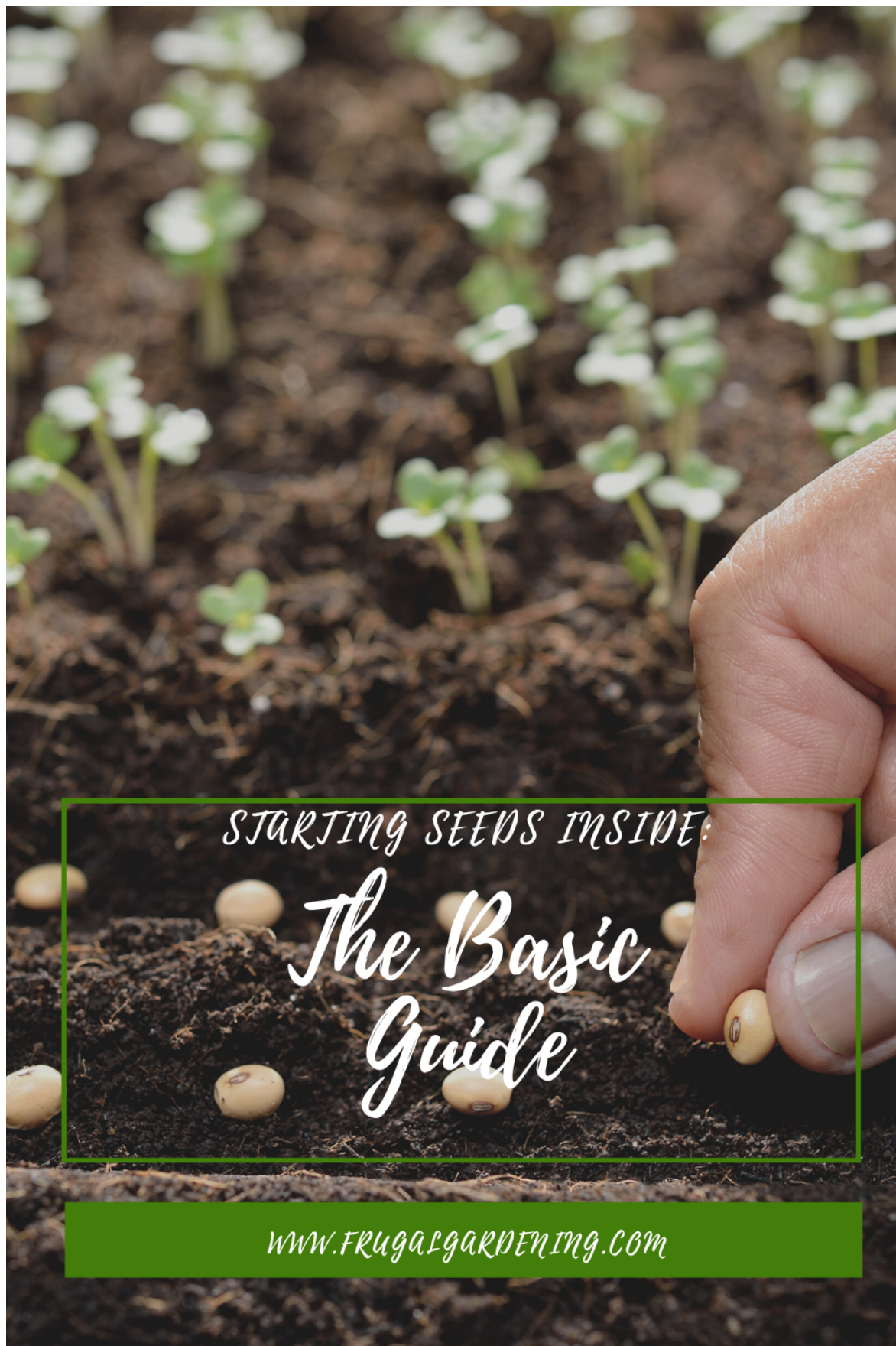


Starting Seeds Inside: The Basic Guide



STARTING SEEDS INSIDE:

The Basic Guide

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This is the time of year my family would begin starting seeds inside. The first week of February was about dreaming of summer by fixing the soil in seedling trays. The next several

weeks brought tiny little plants that always fascinated me.

This post will teach you the basics of seed starting and give you a list of great veggies to germinate before planting.

Germinating Seeds

Germination is the process by which a seed leaves dormancy and begins to grow. Many people like to eat these young plants as sprouts or microgreens.

When Should You Start Your Seeds?

This will depend on 2 factors: where you live and what you are starting. The general rule is to start most veggies 8 weeks before your area's last frost date, but some have unique requirements.

How to Start Your Seeds

You only need a few things: a container, a medium, seeds, and water. Then, follow the directions on the back of the seed packet for individualized instructions on the best methods for starting those seeds.

The Container

The container can be a special seed starting, pot, or even a

[milk jug.](#) The criteria you need to meet is the container needs to be easily covered. In addition, the humidity must be high at the beginning of the germination process, but you must remove the cover as the seedlings grow.

The Medium

Your medium can be peat moss mix, simple soil, or a paper towel. The most crucial part is that it keeps an even dampness. So you want it to hold a decent amount of water without staying wet to prevent mold.

The Seeds

Seeds that are from the previous year will have the best germination rates. Older seeds may germinate, but it could take longer, and fewer seeds will start to grow.

Water

Once you secure the seeds in the medium, you must use enough water to keep the soil damp but not wet. Overwatering can cause mold to grow.

Finishing Your Seeds

Cover your container with transparent plastic to keep the moisture and heat in to encourage the best conditions for germination. As your seedlings grow, you will need to remove the cover altogether. A few weeks before transplanting, you will need to set the seedlings outside for progressively longer times. This “hardening off” process lets the plant get used to the sun without sunburn.

Best Veggies to Start Inside

The following are just a few of the best veggies to start inside.

Tomatoes and Peppers

They easily germinate and take about 6-8 weeks to be ready to transplant outside. These are super popular among gardeners, so you can find many varieties. Just sow in seed starting mix, water lightly, and place in a sunny spot.

Cucumbers and Melons

Another group of easily germinated plants, these don't have as many varieties as tomatoes and peppers, but you will have no problem finding tasty ones that fit your needs. These also take 6-8 weeks to be ready for transplanting. Sow like tomatoes and peppers.

Lettuces

Sow in peat most a few weeks before the last frost date in your area. Then, place the container in a sunny window and transplant it as soon as the ground can be worked.

Conclusion

Starting your own seeds can save you money versus buying transplants. So what seeds do you start inside?

Read More:

[10 Techiques to Increase Gremination Rate](#)

[10 Reasons Your Plants Don't Germinate](#)

[Do I Really Need to Start Seeds Indoors](#)

Cheap and Economical Humidity Dome Alternatives



If you grow your plants from seeds then you probably know what

a humidity dome is. (If not, don't worry, we'll go over it briefly below.) Just like with all of your other gardening supplies, you can buy humidity domes from a variety of different sources. However, you can also DIY them. Here are some cheap and economical humidity dome alternatives.

What Is a Humidity Dome?

A humidity dome sounds like really fancy device, doesn't it? [Bootstrap Farmer](#) says that they're an important part of your seed starting tool kit. But what are they? Basically, they're just plastic lids for your seed trays. Very important, very helpful, but not necessarily fancy at all.

Why Use a Humidity Dome For Seed Starting?

Humidity domes help retain moisture in the soil. Instead of evaporating into the air, the plastic lid catches the moisture and keeps it there with the seeds. Additionally, the lid helps maintain an even temperature for the seeds in the tray. Benefits of using a humidity dome include:

- Less time spent watering
- Less time spent checking and maintaining temperature
- Improved germination rates
- Faster germination
- Protection for delicate, expensive, favorite seeds

Are they necessary? Some say yes, some say no. But as long as you can find cheap and economical humidity dome alternatives then there's really no harm in at least seeing if they improve your seed growing process.

Cheap and Economical Humidity Dome

Alternatives

So, you can obviously shop around and purchase a variety of humidity domes for your gardening. And you can purchase seed trays that come with their own domes. But you can also come up with your own cheap and economical humidity dome alternatives. For example, alternatives offered in a [National Gardening Association](#) forum and over on the [Green Upside](#) website include:

Living Lettuce Containers

Obviously, these are already designed to grow plants – you buy them with lettuce growing inside. When you're done with the lettuce, use the container. It's roomy, about the same width as height, and it's a great option for starting your seeds in at home.

Plastic Wrap

Green Upside explains that you can use plastic wrap around an egg carton seed starting tray or almost any other container to create the humidity dome.

Plastic Bag

Alternatively, you can use a plastic bag the same way. Specifically, Green Upside notes that you can use a wet paper towel inside of a plastic bag to start your seeds ... no other containers needed!

Ready-To-Eat Chicken Containers

You know those chickens that you buy whole, ready to eat, from Costco or the supermarket? They usually come on a plastic tray with a plastic dome over it. If you're a gardener, you might look at that container and think, "that would be perfect for my garden." If you have plants that need room for leaves to

grow, these can be great humidity dome alternatives.

Plastic Bottle

Cut the bottom out of a large plastic bottle, such as a gallon milk bottle. Use that as your humidity dome over your seed tray.

Plastic Containers for Berries

These are an interesting choice. They're shallow, so you have to choose what you're growing in there carefully. Moreover, they're vented with air holes. Sometimes this is a good thing and sometimes it defeats the purpose of your humidity dome. Sometimes too much humidity leads to mold so the venting is good. It depends on varied factors. So, consider this as a potential option but maybe not the best one.

Old Food Containers

Do you have a bunch of food containers that you keep to store your leftovers? Do you have too many of them? Green Upside suggests using any food container with a lid to create your seed tray with its own humidity dome.

In other words, look around for plastic that you can recycle/upcycle to create a humidity home!

Read More:

- [5 Cheap Substitutes for Seedling Trays](#)
 - [10 Techniques To Increase Germination Rate of Seeds](#)
 - [Seed Starting on a Budget: DIY Containers](#)
-

7 Plants You Can Direct Seed



7 PLANTS YOU CAN
Direct Seed

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Recently, I've mentioned that this year I just don't have the bandwidth to garden like I usually do. But that doesn't mean I'm completely abandoning my favorite hobby. Although I didn't

start seedlings indoors, I still have a vast collection of seeds at my disposal, and I've already started sketching a plan for what I want to plant. There are plenty of things I can direct seed and grow without much intervention. A bit of thinning here and there is all that's required.

Some plants are great for direct seeding because they grow quickly. Others do best direct-seeded because they don't transplant well. When I started gardening, I direct seeded *everything*. I didn't have the space to commit to starting seeds indoors, and I didn't really understand that some plants needed long growing seasons to reach maturity. Through the years, though, I've learned about the best plants to direct seed—with a lot of trial and error.

I've even had success direct seeding some dwarf tomato varieties! With gardening, the sky's the limit. But to get you started off on the right foot this year, here are 10 plants you can direct seed just before or after your last frost date.

Plants You Can Direct Seed

Here are some of the easiest plants to direct seed in the garden.

- **Radishes.** These pungent, crispy root vegetables are one of the quickest growing edibles in the garden. Like most root veggies, they don't transplant well. If you're going the [square foot garden](#) route, plant 16 or 9 per square.
- **Carrots.** I just sowed my carrot seeds in the garden. I normally plant 16 per square, but this year I decided to broadcast sow the seeds because I'm planting so many, and I didn't feel like carefully pinching seeds into hundreds of holes. Carrots grow slowly, but they're really easy to grow given the right soil conditions. Once they sprout, all you need to do is thin out the seedlings. After that, regular watering is really all

that's required.

- **Kale.** Another slow-growing one. BUT [kale](#) does exceptionally well when direct-seeded. You can sow kale in the spring before your last frost date. I like the interplant kale with herbs and flowers to entice pollinators and beneficial bugs to settle in. Most years, cabbage loopers decimate my kale crops not under protection. But last year, I had a lot of success pairing my brassicas with flowers and flowering herbs.
- **Spinach.** This crop is another easy one to grow. You'll have the best results sowing early in the spring as soon as the soil is workable. Spinach bolts when the weather gets warm, so early plantings can mitigate premature bolting. Grow spinach in partial shade. The hot afternoon sun, even on a cool day, can trigger bolting.
- **Asian greens.** There are many delicious Asian greens out there, but some of my favorites include bok choy, Chinese broccoli, and frilly mustards. Most of these grow well from seed. You can also harvest them early as baby greens.
- **Summer squash.** I'm not planting squash this year because I have a squash bug problem. But if you're lucky enough not to have to deal with these irritating insects, summer squash is an excellent plant to grow from seed. It grows exceptionally fast, and once it starts to produce, you'll have plenty of food to eat. My favorite variety is [patty pan](#). Sow summer squash right after the last frost date.
- **Beans.** Beans grow so quickly I never bother starting them from seed. They also don't love to be moved around. I prefer bush varieties because they don't require supports, but if you space them too closely, you can end up with a tangled mess. Sow bean seeds right after the last frost date.

Read More

[Yes, you can garden for free](#)

[Ten ways to get free plants for your garden](#)

[How to get free plants](#)

10 Top Reasons Why Seeds Don't Germinate



10 TOP REASONS WHY

Seeds Don't Germinate

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There are a lot of reasons why seeds don't germinate. Knowing what can go wrong is the first step in solving the problem. If you're struggling to start seeds this spring, here are a few

things to look out for.

Why Aren't Seeds Germinating?

Here are a few common reasons why seeds don't germinate.

- **It's too hot.** It's a common misconception that seeds require heat to germinate. Not all seeds like it hot. Some germinate best when the soil is cool. The ideal temperature for lettuce seeds, for instance, is [between 40 to 85 degrees Fahrenheit](#). Closer to 80 degrees means seeds are less likely to emerge.
- **It's too cold.** Similarly, some seeds require plenty of warmth to germinate. Things like tomatoes, eggplant, and peppers do best if you use a heat mat. If you don't provide extra warmth, your seeds may take longer to germinate or not germinate at all.
- **The soil is too wet.** Seeds and [seedlings](#) need air to survive. If you drown your seeds in water, they may not be able to access oxygen, and they'll eventually rot. When starting seeds, you want your soil to be moist but not overly so.
- **Damping-off.** This is a fungal disease that commonly affects seeds and seedlings. Avoid it by using sterilized seed starting mix, disinfecting tools, and using quality seed. If you notice your seedlings continually succumbing to damping-off, it might be wise to throw out that seed packet.
- **Seeds are getting eaten.** In some areas, you may already be direct seeding outside. It's a great way to get a jump start on the season. Unfortunately, some animals, like birds and small mammals, don't really care that you're excited about the gardening season. If you plant seeds and wonder why they aren't germinating, it might be

because critters are eating them when you're not around. You can use netting or other protective covers, like cloches, to keep your seeds away from hungry mouths.

- **You've got duds.** Sometimes, seeds, even from quality retailers, just aren't going to germinate. Most reputable seed companies have a germination percentage figure on their seed packets to let you know how many seeds are expected to germinate. The lower the percentage, the more likely you are to have a few non-starters. If you continually find yourself with duds on your hands, it's time to find a new seed supplier.
- **Your seeds are too old.** Seeds don't last forever. They'll last a shorter time if they're [stored haphazardly](#). Some types of seeds also last longer than others. If your seeds aren't sprouting, check the date on the packet. I often buy packets of seed that contain way more seed than I know I'll be able to use. I like to share seeds with other gardening pals to make sure they don't go to waste.
- **You're not being patient enough.** Some seeds take a while to germinate. While lettuce seedlings usually pop up within less than a week, many herbs take a lot longer to sprout. Others can take months. Seeds will also take longer to germinate if the conditions aren't quite right.
- **Your seeds need an extra helping hand.** Some seed types require periods of freezing weather or soaking in water to sprout. Always carefully read the back of a seed packet to check if this needs to be done. Some flower seeds have hard coatings, so you need to go through these steps to weaken the coating.
- **You've planted them too deep.** This is more of an issue when direct sowing. Only plant as deep as

the length of the seed. So for small seeds like carrots, you want to make sure you're sowing them very shallowly.

Do Pre-Packaged Seeds Grow Faster Than Fresh Seeds?



NO PRE-PACKAGED SEEDS

*Grow Faster Than
Fresh Seeds?*

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It's that time of year when the seed catalogs start arriving in the mailbox. Getting new packets of seeds from a seed supplier is a real treat. Knowing that those carefully

harvested seeds will eventually grow into food or flowers is so exciting.

It's just as satisfying to sort through personally harvested [seeds](#) from your own garden. Collecting seeds right from your garden is not only environmentally responsible but can also save you money in the long run. Shiny new seed packets can get expensive, after all.

Pre-Packaged Seeds vs. Fresh Seeds: What's the Difference?

Confused about what I mean between [fresh and pre-packaged seeds](#)?

Here's why they're different. When I refer to pre-packaged seeds, these are seeds that you buy from seed suppliers. They arrive in packets, and you can buy them in various quantities.

When I talk about fresh seeds, I'm talking about seeds harvested from your garden. When your cilantro plant bolts and flowers, it eventually produces seeds at the end of the season. To harvest them, you dry the pods and remove the seeds.

Hold on, though, fresh is really just a way to distinguish between the two. Once you store your garden-harvested seeds, they aren't technically fresh anymore.

Both pre-packaged and "fresh" seeds can vary in freshness. When buying seeds, always check the packaging date to make sure you haven't received a super old packet.

Really, the only difference between the two is the source.

Pre-Packaged Seeds vs. Fresh Seeds: Which

Grows Faster?

There's nothing more annoying than receiving a packet of seeds and finding out that most are duds. Unfortunately, it happens. It's also proof that buying pre-packaged seeds doesn't guarantee freshness or quality.

The plant growth rate has nothing to do with whether seeds come from your garden or a seed supplier. The same goes for germination. The rate of growth and germination has more to do with how you store seeds.

Proper storage is *everything*. It's key to keeping your seeds viable for longer. Poor storage can turn quality seeds into duds very quickly. To make sure your seeds (whether from your garden or elsewhere) stay fresh:

- Store in an airtight container.
- Don't expose them to moisture.

Tips for Starting Seeds

When the time comes to start seeds, there are also a few things you can do to speed up germination.

- **Match seed type and temperature.** Some seeds [germinate](#) best when exposed to warm temperatures, while others like it cooler. Keeping things at the right temperature can speed up the germination process.
- **Keep soil moist.** Moisture is key for germination, but make sure not to drown those little seeds.
- **Manage airflow.** If you're starting seeds in a confined space, too much humidity can be a problem. It can promote mold growth and disease. If plants are too close together, it can also prevent adequate airflow.

Want some tips on how to save your own seeds? Here is a [handy guide](#) from Seed Savers Exchange.

Troubleshoot the Seed Starting Process



TROUBLESHOOT THE
*Seed Starting
Process*

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While every other region seems to be experiencing a thaw, it's still mostly frozen here. My starts are happily enjoying their spots under the indoor lights and this weekend I'll be

starting another batch of plants like kale and Chinese broccoli. I happened upon a sale and purchased two additional plastic shelving units to hang a bunch of lights I had on hand. The extra space will give me plenty of room to repot tomatoes, peppers, and eggplants, and even start a few extras like flowers and herbs. So far, so good! But that doesn't mean I never have to troubleshoot while seed starting.

Every gardener has run into problems at one point or another. Unfortunately, a lot of information out there doesn't address the many things that could go wrong. Sometimes, even when you follow all the steps, your plants still die, pests still munch on all your greens, and seeds fail to germinate. I recently received a question that I thought would be worth answering here.

Troubleshoot the seed starting process

The beans I put in a couple of weeks ago haven't germinated and have gotten moldy. Are they going to germinate?

The unfortunate answer is no. Bean seeds are notoriously quick to germinate, and their large size makes it easy to spot when that's happening. Let's troubleshoot the seed starting process. Here are a few reasons those seeds may have failed to germinate:

Inadequate moisture

Seeds need moisture to [germinate](#). That doesn't mean you should drown your soil in water. Too much water can lead to rot. This isn't just an issue with seeds, many plants don't do well when they're drowning in water. Waterlogged soil can lead to root rot. Many new plant owners actually kill their indoor houseplants this way.

It's too cold

Beans will sprout in soil that's at least 60 degrees Fahrenheit (about 15 degrees Celcius). The ideal range is between 70 and 80 degrees, though. If you're growing in a basement where it tends to get chilly, consider adding heating mats underneath your pots or plant trays. Sprouting seeds near a window? In the daytime, when exposed to sunlight your plants may be nice and toasty, but on cloudy days or during the evenings, the temperatures likely dip considerably. Although it may be tempting, NEVER use a [space heater](#) to keep your plants warm unless you're in the room and supervising. Space heaters can lead to fires if left unattended.

It's too hot

Certain seeds actually prefer cooler temperatures. Applying heat may be hindering the process. Seeds like lettuce and kale, for instance, might not germinate if conditions are too hot.

Seeds are too old

Properly preserved [seeds](#) can last a while in storage, but most folks simply fold down the packet and toss it wherever is convenient. If your seeds are over a year old and haven't been stored in an airtight container, it's possible they're no longer viable. If you just purchased the seeds? It could be that you received a bad batch. You can try contacting the seed company to ask for a replacement. Buy from reputable companies to avoid getting bad-quality seeds.

Disease

Did you notice a small seedling only to return a day later and find the baby plant shriveled and dead? Damping-off occurs when seedlings are exposed to a fungal disease either through contaminated soil or unsanitary garden implements and

accessories. Prevent this from happening by [sanitizing](#) your seed trays, pots, and tools every year. Purchase a sterile seed starting mix from a reputable company.

It's ok to ignore algae

If you're working with a hydroponic setup, you may notice algae build-up on your soil pods. It's a bit unsightly but it's anything to worry about. If it bothers you, you can cover the pods with tin foil to prevent algae growth.

A note about mold

Are you wondering what's with all the mold? If you're noticing a fuzzy white substance covering your freshly soil-filled pots or trays, it's a sign that you're overwatering your seedlings or that your growing area isn't properly ventilated. Placing a fan in your growing space will help strengthen seedlings and keep air circulating. Watering from below may also help reduce the risk of mold growth.

A specific tip for growing beans

Don't bother starting them indoors. Wait until all chance of frost has passed and direct sow seeds outside. Why? Beans don't respond well to the transplanting process. You'll have healthier bean plants if you sow outdoors.

I like to plant a few different bean varieties that mature at different times, so I always have a steady stream of beans to harvest for my dinner plate. Beans are pretty easy to grow, and they're really fun to harvest. Finding ready-to-eat pods among the foliage is like a gardening treasure hunt!

Other seeds that prefer to be direct-seeded:

- carrots
- radishes

- rutabaga
- beets
- parsnip
- parsley

Something all these have in common is that they have a large taproot. Transplanting tends to disturb the taproot and can stress the plant to the point of no return. It doesn't mean you can't start these indoors ever, but chances are higher that your plants will become stressed during transplanting.

What Are the Different Ways to Germinate Citrus Seeds?



WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT WAYS

*to Germinate
Citrus Seeds?*

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I *always* have lemons in my fridge. The bright acidic quality of lemon juice adds a fantastic oomph to food that you just can't get with other kinds of acids. Lemon also pairs well

with pasta, chicken, and roasted veggies. I also often have limes on hand because they're perfect for brightening up Mexican and Thai dishes.

Of course, it's not always convenient to have a bag of lemons, limes, and other citrus fruits in your fridge. If you only cook for one person or two, they're likely to go bad before you can use them, and a lot of citrus fruit can be quite expensive at the supermarket.

So what's a foodie to do? Grow your very own citrus plants at home! It's easy to germinate citrus seeds right in your kitchen. They're not only delicious, but they're also [healthy](#)!

What you need for success

Before we dive into how to germinate citrus seeds, it's important to note that most citrus fruits don't do well in cold climates. If you plan to grow citrus indoors, you'll need a spot that gets a *lot* of sun. You should also plan to water and mist your fruit tree regularly, but never ever overwater. Waterlogging the roots of a citrus tree is one of the quickest ways to kill it.

Many citrus tree varieties are excellent container plants and easy to grow inside. If it's warm enough in the summer, feel free to move your trees outside for some sun, fresh air, and rain. Opt for dwarf varieties if you're growing inside or in a small outdoor space.

How to germinate citrus seeds

Did you know you can [germinate citrus seeds](#) from the fruit you buy at the grocery store?

To sprout those [seeds](#), remove them from the flesh and soak them overnight. Soaking the seeds helps break down the thick coating that prevents water and air from getting inside.

After soaking, it's time to plant the seeds. Pop them in some potting soil. Make sure your potting soil is moist—if it's too dry or wet, your seeds won't sprout, so you're looking for a middle ground. A general rule when planting any kind of seed is to set it to a depth that corresponds with the seed itself. Small seeds, like carrot seeds, for instance, require shallow sowing. Larger seeds, like those of citrus or [squash](#), need to be sown a little deeper.

Use plastic wrap, or a seed starting dome to cover the potting soil. This helps retain moisture. Set your potted seed somewhere sunny and warm.

Once the seed sprouts, remove the plastic. At this phase, too much moisture can create problems.

To promote continued growth, feed your lil' citrus plant every once in a while with a balanced fertilizer. Thankfully, there are quite a few citrus-specific fertilizers on the market, which makes it easy to identify the right formula for your needs.

Citrus fruit trees will take some time to bear fruit, and it largely depends on the type and variety of citrus. Once fruits appear, they also take a while to ripen. Don't pick fruits until they're ripe. Unlike tomatoes, they won't get any riper after being picked.

Seed Starting with Recycled Materials



There's no need to use fancy equipment to [start seeds](#). You have plenty of perfectly suitable materials lying around the house—probably about to end up in the trash or recycling bin. Seed starting with recycled materials is easy!

Don't spend a ton of money on trays and flats. Save your hard-earned money and reduce, reuse, and recycle. A little bit of frugal know-how is all you need to germinate and sprout seeds for free.

Starting seeds now?

You might be wondering why I'm talking about seed starting when summer is on our heels. Isn't seed starting reserved for the late winter and early spring?

Of course not!

If a productive garden is what you seek, you should always have something ready to replace harvested plants. Think of it cyclically. The wheels are always turning in the garden. If they stop, you'll have less to harvest.

Now is the perfect time to start thinking about what the fall garden will look like. It's also important to consider succession sowing.

I'll offer up an example. In the spring, I planted spinach seeds in a patch of my garden. Last week, I harvested them because they were starting to dislike the hot weather and most were mature and ready to pick. That left the squares previously occupied squares empty. Uh oh!

There are two options when this happens; one requires a bit more prep than the other.

1. Replace the harvested plant with transplants that are ready to go (which involves seed starting)
2. Sow seeds (this time of year, quick-growing plants or stuff that will be ready for harvest in the fall is ideal)

For this spot, I chose to sow [kale](#) and carrot seeds, but I also have several seedlings growing in a tray to put in the next vacated garden square.

Recycled seed starting

Okay, you're ready to prep seedlings and do some seed starting with recycled materials. Here are some free, DIY container ideas to consider:

Yogurt and applesauce cups: Small single-serve containers are ideal for starting small plants like lettuce. Use big tubs for larger plants like tomatoes.

Fruit clamshell packaging: These are perfect for seed starting because they feature built-in drainage.

Solo cups: Or any type of party or paper cup, for that matter.

Egg cartons: Don't toss these in the recycling bin. Use them to start seeds!

Drink cartons: Whether for milk or juice, cartons are great because they provide a bit more real-estate than other recycled seed starting options. Just be sure to clean the cartons thoroughly before adding soil and planting seeds.

Recycled plant trays: When you buy plants in bulk at the nursery you'll usually gain a few free plant trays in the process. If you don't have any on hand, ask around. Most people toss these out without a second thought. In the late spring, you might even find plenty of these on the curb.

Takeout containers: Next time you indulge in takeout food, don't throw away the containers. Wash them by hand (if they're sturdy enough they might survive the top rack of your dishwasher) and use them to start seeds.

A quick note that many recycled seed starting vessels don't have any drainage holes so be sure to poke a few to prevent root rot. Set your containers on some kind of tray to prevent water from pooling on the counter, table, or other surfaces.

Hardening Off Plants Headache-Free



Hardening off plants is one of my least favorite gardening tasks. It requires a lot of care and attention, and it's really easy to mess it up. I've yet to perfect the shuffle that involves bringing trays of seedling outside then back in. There's always something that goes wrong. So let me help you avoid mistakes of your own by sharing all of mine, past, and present.

What is hardening off?

Hardening off plants involves [acclimating](#) your indoor-grown seedlings to the outdoor climate and conditions. Inside your house, your baby plants are given plenty of tender, love, and care. If you don't take the time to harden off your [seedlings](#) here's what can happen:

- Seedlings die because it's too cold.
- Seedlings experience leaf burn because the sun is a whole lot stronger than any indoor lights your plant has previously been exposed to.

- Seedlings die or become sickly because of transplant shock.
- Seedlings topple over and stems break because it's windy.

How do I harden off my seedlings?

First, you should have an idea of when it's appropriate to transplant your seedlings. Peppers and [eggplants](#) won't be heading outside anytime soon in my climate because it's still way too cold at night.

Hardening off plants involves exposing them, little by little to outdoor temperatures, and, of course, the strong rays of the sun. In my experience, it takes a little over a week to complete the process because not every day looks the same weather-wise. Today, for instance, I didn't bother putting my transplants outside for their second day of hardening off because the weather is stormy. I didn't want to risk harming my tender starts.

Here's a handy guide for hardening off seedlings

- Day 1: Set out in the shade for 1-2 hours. Make sure the plants aren't exposed to direct sunlight on their first day out in the wild.
- Day 2: Increase outdoor plant time slightly, keeping them in shade.
- Day 3: Increase time outdoors again with a little bit of time in the sun—make sure they're not exposed to the sun at the hottest part of the day. They're still not ready for that.
- Day 4 and 5: Increase time outside in shade and sun incrementally.
- Day 6 to 7: Keep plants outside almost all day but bring them in at night.

Once that week of hardening off is complete, it's time to transplant your starts in the garden.

Errors to Avoid

There's a lot of juggling around when hardening off plants. Set yourself a timer, so you don't forget to bring plants inside, especially in the first few days. It's easy to accidentally leave a tray of seedlings out in the hot afternoon sun and oops! You have a tray of burned plants on your hands.

Don't forget to water your plants! And if it rains, watch that your plants don't stay sitting in a puddle of water all day. Drain the trays accordingly.

Check the forecast, too. You don't need to stick to a strict hardening off schedule. Adjust if you need to. Will it be unexpectedly chilly tomorrow? Don't set out heat-loving starts until a day later when the warmth has returned.

Victory Garden Planning during a Pandemic



We're in the thick of it now. Areas are going into lockdown, and non-essential businesses are closing until further notice. It feels weird. It's scary. I'm exhausted. But I feel motivated, now more than ever, to keep up my gardening efforts. I've seen interest in [gardening](#) skyrocket. Is this the return of the victory garden?

I know a lot of you are anxious to get started and make up for lost time. While it's a little late to start crops like onions, there's still plenty of time to prep before the last frost date passes you by.

Starting Seeds

Last year, I wrote a series of posts about seed starting. The posts covered a lot of ground, so I recommend checking out a few of those articles. Many of them go over the many mistakes you can make during the process and provide tips for avoiding fatal errors. Here's a roundup of a few posts you should read:

[Seed starting Mistakes to Avoid](#)

[Is Starting from Seed Worth it?](#)

[The Importance of Air Circulation](#)

[Seed Germination](#)

[Watering Seedlings](#)

Now is a great time to consider starting your victory garden [plants from seed](#). Why? With many stores shutting their physical locations, you'll likely have a tough time finding starts. Don't hesitate to contact your local nursery, though. Many locations are offering delivery for all sorts of items.

What Should I Grow in my Victory Garden?

I get this question a lot. Whether you have a ton of space or a small balcony, the answer is two-fold:

Things you like to eat

If vegetable gardening is your goal, think about what pops up often on your dinner plate. Don't bother with things that are easy if they don't appeal to your palate.

I love greens and eat a lot of kale, arugula, and bok choy, so those are some of the crops that feature prominently in my garden.

Conversely, I don't love cucumbers that much and rarely sacrifice a lot of growing space to them. One plant is more than enough and, I usually only use them for pickling. Some years, I don't bother with cukes at all.

Things that are easy

Unless you're an avid gardener or don't mind dealing with finicky crops, stick to things that are easy to grow. Remember, though, easy is relative. Something that's easy to

grow in one climate may be a pain to grow in another. Or perhaps it's tougher to produce a particular crop in your area because of a recurring pest issue. I don't bother with corn anymore, because squirrels always make off with the goods when I'm not looking.

Your best bet is to pick plants that meet somewhere in the middle. The best plants for your victory garden are those that provide a significant reward compared to the effort expended. For instance, I love love, love, eggplants. They're a bit tricky to grow in my climate, because they prefer hot weather and don't enjoy temperature swings (which are common here, especially at the start and end of the summer). Still, I love them so much I'm willing to deal with these delicate plants. On the plus side, I never have pest issues with my eggplants. The result? A plant that provides a big reward upon harvest (because I love eating eggplant!) but doesn't require an unreasonable amount of effort to grow.