

When Should I Transplant Sunflower Seedlings?



In the world of gardening, sunflowers stand tall as symbols of happiness and resilience, drawing both seasoned gardeners and beginners to their sun-seeking blooms. With the growing trend towards sustainable living and the joy of home gardening, understanding the nuances of growing sunflowers, particularly when to transplant sunflower seedlings, has never been more relevant. This article will guide you through each crucial step, ensuring your sunflowers flourish.

Growing Sunflowers from Seeds Indoors



For some gardeners, starting their sunflower journey begins with planting seeds indoors. This method gives your sunflowers a head start, protecting them from early-season frosts and pests. Use quality seed-starting mix in pots or trays, placing the seeds about an inch deep. Sunflower seeds typically germinate within 7 to 10 days in warm conditions, so ensure they're kept in a spot that receives plenty of light and warmth. Also, keep the light a bit low, as it helps the plants become more robust. By doing so, this controlled environment fosters strong, healthy seedlings, ready for the great outdoors when the time is right.

How to Tell If Sunflower Seedlings Are Ready for Transplant



Sunflower seedlings announce their readiness for transplanting in a few key ways. First, look for the development of their second set of true leaves, a reliable indicator that they've outgrown their initial confines. Generally, you want at least four true leaves before moving forward. Additionally, a robust root system should start to fill the confines of their pots, signaling a need for more space. These milestones typically occur a few weeks after germination, depending on the growing conditions and sunflower variety.

Optimal Season and Weather Conditions for Transplanting Sunflower Seedlings



The best time to transplant sunflower seedlings outdoors is after the last frost when the soil has warmed sufficiently. Sunflowers thrive in warm conditions and can be stunted or damaged by cold snaps. Ideal transplanting conditions include a mild, overcast day to prevent immediate sun exposure stress. This gentle introduction to the outdoor environment can significantly improve the seedlings' chances of thriving once they're planted outdoors.

Best Location to Transplant Sunflower Seedlings



Sunflowers are heliotropic in their early stages, meaning they follow the sun across the sky, so choosing a sunny spot is crucial. Select a location that receives at least 6-8 hours of direct sunlight daily. Sunflowers aren't fussy about soil but prefer well-draining ground. Avoid spots prone to waterlogging or that remain in shadow for extended periods.

Preparing Sunflower Seedlings for Transplanting



Preparation is key to a smooth transition. Begin by hardening off your seedlings, gradually acclimatizing them to outdoor conditions over a week. This process involves exposing them to outside temperatures and sunlight incrementally, reducing transplant shock. Ensure your garden bed is ready, too, with loose, fertile soil to welcome the young plants.

How to Transplant Sunflower Seedlings Correctly



Transplanting day is crucial for your sunflower seedlings. Dig holes slightly larger than the seedlings' root balls, spacing them according to the variety's expected mature size. Gently remove the seedlings from their containers, trying not to disturb the roots unless they're root-bound. If the roots are dense and tangled, gently loosen them. Then, place the seedlings in the holes. Finally, backfill with soil and water thoroughly to settle them in and eliminate air pockets.

Properly Spacing Sunflower Seedlings



Spacing is vital for sunflower seedlings to ensure they have enough room to thrive. Proper spacing prevents competition for nutrients and light, both of which are essential for healthy growth and maximum bloom size. Smaller varieties can be planted closer together, potentially as close as 6 inches apart. Taller sunflowers typically require at least 1 foot of space, while giant sunflowers need more room, so plant them about 2-3 feet apart.

Caring for Sunflower Seedlings After Transplanting



Post-transplant care involves regular watering to keep the soil moist but not soggy, especially during dry spells. Mulching can help retain soil moisture and suppress weeds. Watch for pests and diseases, and support taller varieties with stakes to prevent them from toppling over in strong winds.

**Successfully
Sunflowers**

Transplanting



Transplanting sunflower seedlings at the right time and with proper care sets the foundation for a garden filled with these joyful blooms. By paying attention to the readiness of your seedlings, the optimal conditions for transplanting, and providing the care they need in their new environment, you'll be rewarded with a stunning display of sunflowers. Whether for their beauty, the seeds they produce, or the joy of gardening, sunflowers bring light and life to any garden space.

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](#)

Do Pre-Packaged Seeds Grow Faster Than Fresh Seeds?



NO PRE-PACKAGED SEEDS

*Grow Faster Than
Fresh Seeds?*

WWW.FRUGALGARDENING.COM

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



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?*

WWW.FRUGALGARDENING.COM

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 ripier 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.

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.

Soil Block Success!!!



Flickr via [Kevin Doncaster](#)

Whenever I experiment with something new during the seed starting season, I feel incredibly anxious. What if it goes wrong? What if I end up with unhealthy starts? Believe me. I've made my fair share of mistakes that have resulted in disaster.

I tried using jiffy pellets one year, and my seedlings were stunted. Another year, I tried plastic pots. It was a slightly pricier endeavor than the peat pellets, but I hoped that it would result in more vigorous seedlings. It ended up being a frustrating experience. The pots were flimsy, and many of my seedlings became root-bound.

Another year, everything was going great, but the humidity levels in my basement grow space were less than ideal. I ended up trashing most of my seedlings because of damping off.

I've done things to kill seedlings, and I've had things happen that were totally outside of my control. Needless to say, I

was really nervous about trying something new, but I was excited to see if it would make this part of the gardening process a bit easier and a bit kinder on my wallet.

Creating Soil Block

Last weekend, after a particularly long day and a week that felt like it was never going to end, I finally decided to start some seedlings—early March is the time to start tomatoes, peppers, and eggplants if you're in Zone 5.

I was exhausted but determined to get going. Nightshades are notoriously slow to germinate, so I didn't want to wait any longer.

I dumped some soil mix into a bucket (I bought a specialty sterile mix this year because honestly, a few extra bucks seemed worth it to avoid the massacre of seedlings I dealt with last spring) and added water until I got a goopy consistency.

What I Learned

In retrospect, I don't think I added enough water. Lesson learned. For the next batch of seedlings, I'll aim for a slurry and not a goop.

Soil blocking was less messy than I envisioned, but you definitely get your hands dirty! I rolled up my sleeves and pushed the metal blocking tool into the soil goop until there was water seeping out a bit.

Then, I popped the perfectly formed blocks onto my tray.

I was amazed at how well-formed the blocks were and still are. A few are crumbling slightly, but all in all, they're doing fine.

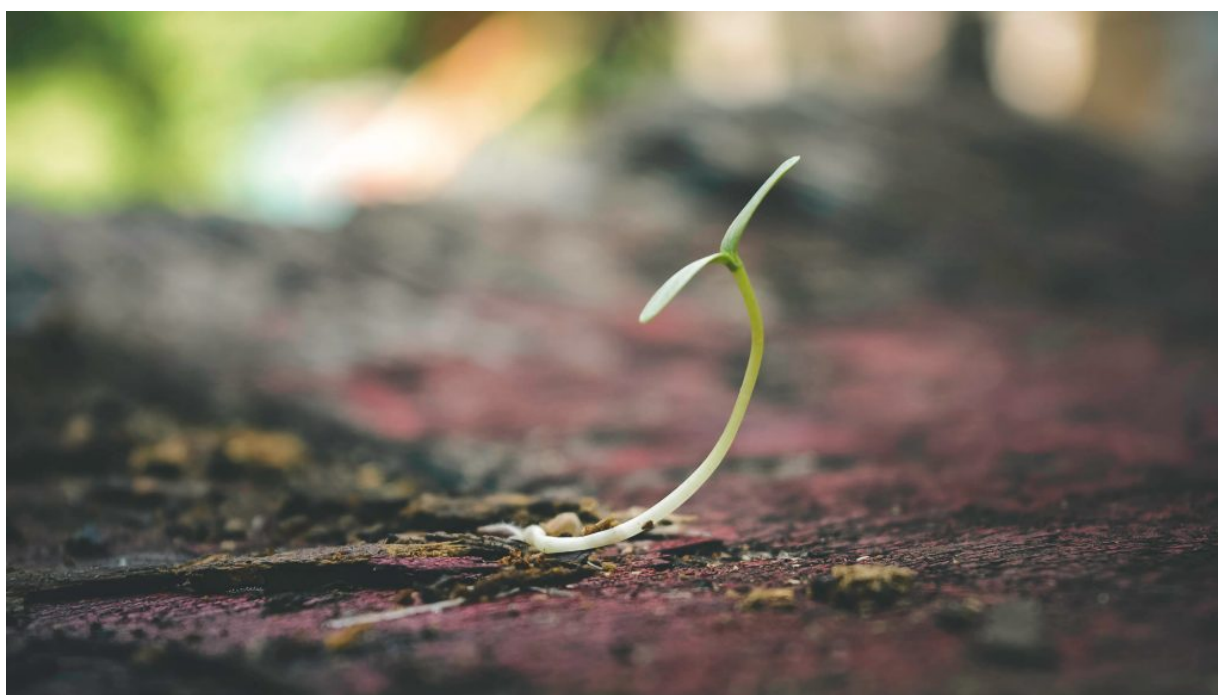
<https://www.instagram.com/p/B9Nma-3DeSG/>

I definitely have to work on my technique—the mix should have more water and I need to compress the blocks a bit more, too—but I feel confident that this is a method I'll be using from now on. I'm so grateful not to have to deal with pots ever again. What a relief!

Looking Forward

I've been misting the blocks and watering from underneath (something I usually do with all my plants) and I'm eager to see how things go when it's time to transplant the seedlings. Though perhaps that's thinking too far ahead. Maybe I'll just wait and see if anything actually sprouts!

I'm New to Gardening: Is Starting From Seed Worth It?



'Tis the season to start fielding questions from curious

friends interested in starting a garden. One of my friends recently moved into a new home and is keen to grow a few incredible edibles in her available outdoor space. She's unsure of whether to bother with seed starting and wondered if she'd be better off simply buying plants at a local nursery.

What should she do? Here's a breakdown of the two options.

Benefits of Seed Starting

Seed starting is a great way to get started with gardening. Here's why:

- **There's so much choice.** When you're starting from seed, you have a whole slew of plants available to you. You're not stuck with the single variety available at the local nursery.
- **You have control over plant growth.** You decide the products used to grow your plants. Do you want to use organic methods? Go right ahead! When buying from a nursery, you may not have all the information about a plant's history. You also need to pay close attention to any hitchhikers when purchasing plants from someone else. Are there pests hidden in the foliage? Are there any signs of disease?
- **It's a rewarding process.** There's nothing that compares to the feeling of watching a plant go from seed to harvest. It's a seriously fulfilling adventure.

Of course, seed starting also has plenty of drawbacks. It requires time and effort. You'll need to watch your plants for signs of distress and work to ensure they have everything they need (light, water, nutrients, and room to grow).

While seed starting setup costs vary significantly, there's some initial investment required. Though, it's easy to start [seeds on a budget](#).

The risk of failure is probably the biggest potential drawback, but I'm of the opinion that [failure](#) is the best way to learn!

Benefits of purchasing from a nursery

I think buying from a nursery has its pros, especially if you're just starting and plan to work in a small space. Buying a handful of plants isn't much more expensive than starting a shelving unit full of seeds.

- **Plant availability.** While you have a lot more variety at your fingertips when starting from seed, you'll find hard-to-grow plants at your nursery. Things like asparagus, fruit bushes, and fruit trees are tough to grow from seed but are readily available at local nurseries.
- **Simplicity.** If you're a busy person, the time required to take care of seedlings is something to consider. Buying from a nursery is easy and requires minimal effort.
- **Questions answered.** At specialized nurseries, the staff is available to answer all of your questions, which is super useful if you're totally new to gardening.

Of course, there's no reason you can't do both! Last year, contaminated soil mix caused most of my seedlings to die, and I was left with only a handful of viable starts. I ended up buying a bunch of plants at my local nursery to make up for my devastating loss.

Can you think of any other benefits to either option that I forgot to mention? Let me know! Leave a comment with your thoughts.

A New Seed Starting Adventure With Soil Blocks



I'm rushing to set up my grow shelves and get going with seed starting this year. I came down with another illness over a week ago and it hit me hard. The second time this winter! And it was a nasty bug that left me unable to move from the couch. I spent my time laid up thinking about how I was running behind with all my seed starting activities. As soon as I felt better, I began an inventory of my seeds and ordered seed starting mix.

I also decided to invest in a whole new seed starting tool this year: **a soil blocker.**

I'm tired of buying crappy pots and DIY vessels to start seeds. Even when I locate a good deal, it always seems insane

to spend money on containers that are difficult to sanitize and keep looking like new. I abhor having to re-pot tiny seedlings into bigger pots, too. In my quest to simplify the process, I decided to experiment with something new – soil blocks.

What are soil blocks?

Instead of filling pots and containers with soil mix, soil blocking involves a metal press-like tool that compresses wet dirt into manageable, uniform clods. Plant seed directly into the cube and never have to deal with pots again!

Soil blockers are available in multiple sizes, and it's possible to pot a smaller soil cube onto a larger one. A significant advantage of this seed-starting method, though, is that plants are much more unlikely to become root-bound than their potted counterparts.

A breakdown of soil block advantages

Soil blocking certainly involves some up-front costs. I spent about \$40 for a metal blocker that will create blocks of 2-inches by 2-inches. I intend to purchase another block to make 4-inch by 4-inch blocks, as well. You'll also need trays to house your finished soil block seedlings—this is something I already have. If you need a quick, cheap solution, head to the Dollar Store and grab some inexpensive baking sheet packs to house your blocks. Once you've purchased these supplies, however, the only renewable costs involved are seed and soil mix. Here's why I've decided to switch to this method:

- **No more pots.** They're costly and aren't always reusable. Quality varies significantly, and for those with limited storage space, they take up a whole lot of room. No more time is wasted sanitizing pots each winter in preparation for seed starting.

- **Quick and efficient.** Making blocks is easy and a lot less time consuming than filling small awkward-shaped pots.
- **No-fuss transplanting.** Potting up is a pain in the butt with containers but with soil blocks, it's incredibly straightforward. Moving plants into the garden is similarly easy. Plants are a lot hardier and since they're never removed from their containers, they experience far less transplant shock than potted seedlings.
- **Space-saving.** In previous years, the cheapest pots I could find were round in shape, and it was difficult to make efficient use of my shelving space. Soil blocks don't take up as much [space](#).
- **Healthy, strong starts.** Plants never become root-bound and roots are much healthier than with plants left in pots. Far less handling and moving around during the seed starting process produces robust seedlings.

I'm looking forward to sharing my progress with soil blocks this season! Here's hoping it goes smoothly.