

Planting a Seed

Your role is to get the seed started, which means planting it so that it can grow.

Seeds can last for many years in their original condition, provided that they are kept cool and dry. To spark germination, seeds need to be put into the right medium and environment.

If you have received seeds from a friend who might have dried and saved them from last year's harvest, you should also get their advice on how to get the seeds started.

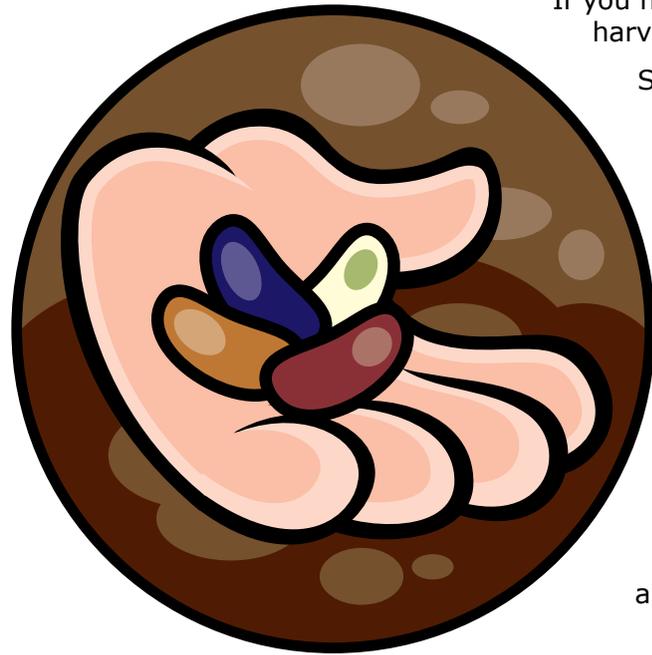
Seeds purchased from the garden centre will usually have directions right on the package. Read the instructions carefully, paying attention to when and how to plant the seeds, and the spacing needed between them.

Some seeds can be planted right into the ground during spring once the last frost has passed.

Other seeds can be started earlier by planting them indoors.

To figure out when to start planting indoors, you must know when you will be able to take your seedlings outside and plant them in the garden. This timing is based on when your area will be frost-free--that is, when temperatures stay above freezing. Working backwards from there, you will then need to count the number of days needed for their growth from seed to seedling to ultimately being planted in the garden.

Some seeds need to be soaked in water, put in the fridge or scarified (which means gently loosening the shell with something like a nail file or sandpaper) before being planted. Again, check the instructions on your seed package for these details, as well as for planting depth and spacing.



Container Planting



Seeds can be planted in many different kinds of containers. Special trays or flats can be purchased or you can look around your home to find something suitable like egg cartons, plastic containers or cut-off milk containers.

The container needs to have a depth that will allow room for roots to develop. Look for something that is at least 5 to 8 cm deep. There needs to be some kind of drainage at the bottom of the container. If you are using a plastic container, make sure that there is a hole in the bottom to allow water to drain. Placing your container on a saucer or tray will help to catch any water that flows through.

After years of gardening, you might decide to save pots or containers from one year to use for the next season. If you go this route, pay particular attention to making sure that they are clean before using them to plant again. Clean them with hot water and soap, making sure to rinse and dry them well before adding soil.

Your garden centre should have a variety of soil-less planting mediums that can be used for your planting (usually sold in bags labelled "potting mix"). Try not to use garden soil as

your starter as it might contain diseases, weeds or bugs.

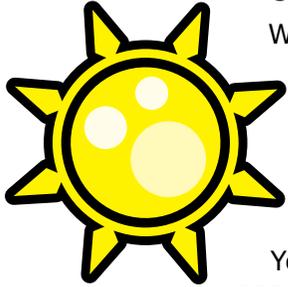
Before putting your soil in containers, water it. It shouldn't be too sappy but just wet enough to be moist. Once you have added water, grab a handful of soil and squeeze it. If water drips out, it's too wet. Just add more soil till the water is absorbed.

Fill your containers with soil and place seeds on top of the soil. Sprinkle a thin layer of soil to cover the seeds. Then water the soil.



Caring for your seedlings indoors

Put the containers where they can get heat and light. The top of your fridge is often a good spot to use for warmth. Once the seedlings emerge, you should relocate them to a sunny location – a south- or west-facing window is helpful.



Warm (not hot) water can be used for watering during the first couple of days. After that, use water that is slightly above room temperature. A spray pump or mister is a good way to soak the soil.

Once your seedlings have grown to the point where they are showing a couple of leaves, you need to transplant them to give each of them more space. Be gentle! The seedlings are very delicate --- don't handle them by their stems.

If there are too many seedlings, you will need to thin them so that there is enough space for continued growth. You can do this when they are still in their original container, clipping the weaker seedlings at the surface of the soil by using a pair of scissors or your fingers.

It's not necessary to pull out the roots that remain - they will decompose in the soil.

Approximately two weeks before the seedlings are to be planted in the garden, you can start to get them accustomed to their outdoor life through a process called "hardening off." Basically, you set the seedlings outside in a sunny spot that is protected from the wind and elements for a couple of hours each day. The amount of time can be lengthened every day.



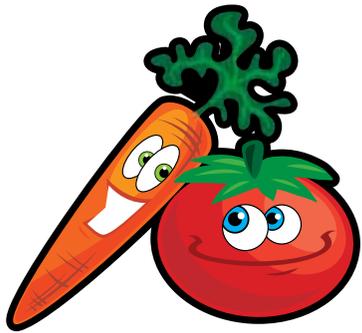
When you are transplanting your seedlings to the garden, gently remove each seedling (water them in advance to help loosen the soil), being careful not to squeeze the stems or hurt the roots.

Place each seedling in a hole allowing enough room for its roots. Generally, the hole should be slightly deeper and wider than the plant's root ball. Place the seedling somewhat lower in the hole than the depth at which it was growing in its container.

Fill in the space with soil and pat the soil around the seedling to firm up the area and support the plant. Add water immediately after planting each seedling.

Space the seedlings according to their planting directions. Avoid planting them too





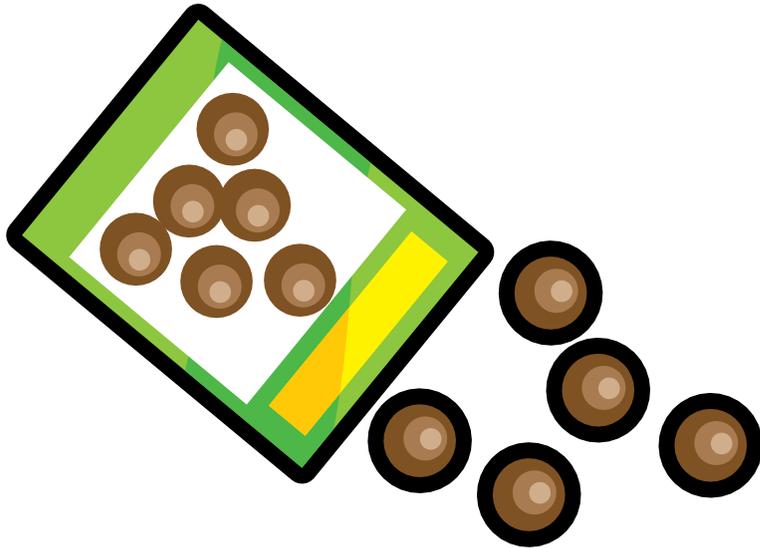
close together. What looks like a lot of space between them at the beginning of the season will quickly be filled in with their growth in the weeks and months ahead.

While your plants will grow up and out, the location of your plant's growth is dependent on where you first place it in the garden. To get your rows straight, you can use your hoe to mark out a path. A string tied at both ends of the garden or a long piece of wood can help guide you.

It is important to keep the soil moist until the seedlings are established. When the seedlings have emerged and developed their second or third set of true leaves, thin them as needed so that you keep the strongest plants, leaving the remaining ones spaced as directed on the seed package. It is best to thin seedlings while they are still small, so that you aren't disturbing the roots of the plants which will remain.

Direct Planting in the Garden

Many seeds can simply be planted directly in the ground once the danger of frost is gone. Again, follow the directions on the seed package to guide your planting.



Sometimes the seeds are so small that it is hard to place them individually in the ground. You might want to just keep them in the opened package and carefully tap the package, allowing a couple of seeds to fall at a time.

Cover the seeds with a thin layer of soil (avoiding clumps and rocks).

A thorough spray of water needs to be done before your work is complete (be gentle so that the seeds remain covered).

Besides starting from seed, you can buy also already-started vegetable plants at garden centres during the spring. If you go this route, inspect each plant carefully to make sure that it is healthy and free of disease and insects. Select those that have good root growth and sturdy, well-developed leaves.