

**CARVER SCOTT EXTENSION MASTER GARDENERS****2017****SUCCESS WITH SEEDS****SOWING MEDIUM**

Seeds prefer lightweight, relatively fine, seed starting mix for best germination. Use commercial seed-starting medium or mix your own using fine-screened peat, vermiculite and/or perlite.

CONTAINERS

Plastic four- or six-packs are most economical and take up the least amount of space. Use new containers or wash and sterilize used ones. Avoid clay (weight, dryness) and round (space) containers, but it is certainly acceptable to utilize recycled containers (yogurt, egg cartons, etc.) or make your own from newspaper. Take care to be sure “biodegradable” containers actually degrade appropriately.

MOISTURE

Dampen seed-starting mix to the consistency of a wrung-out sponge before sowing. A fine spray of plain water following sowing is enough to settle the seeds into contact with the starting mix. A cover of plastic wrap or a plastic dome is generally enough to maintain moisture until the seeds germinate. Once seedlings are up and growing, water the soil when it is dry (light-colored) using room temperature water. Do not allow water to stand in the saucers.

LABELS

Be sure to mark your seedling packs with type and variety. Broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, and kohlrabi seedlings all look remarkably alike! And you can't tell a pink petunia from a purple one when the seedlings are small.

LIGHT

Barely cover seeds that need light to germinate. Some seeds that require dark also prefer to be sown on top of the seed medium, so for these, cover the pack with dark plastic to exclude light until the seeds sprout. Be sure to remove all covers as soon as the seeds begin to grow. Once plants have germinated, provide the brightest light possible by using fluorescent lights placed 2 to 4 inches above the plants.

TEMPERATURE

Most seeds require soil temperatures of 70-80F. Unless you have a consistently warm room, provide additional heat with a special seed-starting mat or soil-heating cable.

CARE AFTER GERMINATION

Thin additional seedlings by cutting extras off at soil line with a scissors. Good air circulation is critical, and can be provided using an oscillating fan set on low and directed toward the seedlings. Once true leaves appear, begin fertilizing weekly with a water-soluble fertilizer mixed at ¼ strength.

TRANSPLANTING

Pot up seedlings to slightly larger containers if the roots are visible along the edges of the root ball (slip a plant out of container to check), but before the plant becomes root bound. Handle the plants only by their leaves or roots, never by the stem. Harden seedlings off by acclimating them gradually to outdoor conditions over a 1 to 2 week period. Plant them outdoors once hardened, preferably on a mild, still, cloudy day.

SEED SAVING

Many flowers and most podded plants (radish, okra, peas, beans, etc.) are easy seeds to save. Keys to best germination are saving only ripe seeds that are fully dry. Seeds from fruits must be separated from the flesh, cleaned, and dried before storage.

SEED STORAGE

All seeds keep best when stored cool and dry. Paper packets for individual seed types are best. Group packets in covered glass or plastic containers with a packet or two of silica gel, and store them in refrigerator or freezer for best shelf life. Fresh seed will generally keep for one year at room temperature as long as the humidity isn't too high.

RESOURCES

- *Seed Starters Handbook* by Nancy Bubel
- *Park's Success with Seeds* (1982)
- Stokes and/or Park Seed Catalogs
- www.seedsavers.org
- www.extension.umn.edu

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