

Starting seeds indoors speeds up growing process

By Melinda Myers

Get a jump on the growing season by starting your favorite or hard to find plants indoors from seeds. Starting hard to find plants, like many of the heirloom or newly introduced varieties, from seed may be the only way you will be able to add these to your garden. Plus, you'll be extending the growing season and bringing the fun of gardening indoors.

All you need is a little space, a few supplies and of course seeds to get started. Check the back of your seed packets for planting directions. Most recommend when and how to start seeds indoors as well as any other special care the seedlings will need.

Purchase, recycle or make your own containers from newspaper. Sanitize used pots by dipping them in a one part bleach and nine parts water solution and then rinsing them with clean water.



Indoor lights can bring seeds to life.
Photo/Gardener's Supply Company

Fill the containers with a sterile well-drained potting mix or seed starting mix. Once the containers are filled, plant the seeds according to the seed packet directions.

For most seeds, plant them twice their diameter deep and gently water. Continue to water often enough to keep the soil slightly moist. Extend the time between watering and increase your seed starting success by covering the container with plastic. Or purchase a seed starting kit.

Move your containers to a sunny window as soon as the seedlings emerge from the soil. Turn plants often to encourage even growth. Or increase your success by growing seedlings under artificial lights. You can make your own light system or purchase tabletop, shelf units or easy to assemble light systems. Keep the lights four to six inches above the top of the seedlings for best results. As the seedlings grow, be sure to maintain this distance by simply raising the lights or lowering the containers.

Move overcrowded seedlings to larger containers once they have two sets of true leaves. The first leaves that appear are rather indistinct and are called seed leaves. The next set of leaves look more like the mature plant's leaves and are called true leaves. Once the next set of true leaves forms, it is time to transplant overcrowded seedlings.

Use a fork or spoon to carefully lift out the seedling. Clusters of seedlings can be dug and carefully teased apart before planting in individual pots. Be careful not to pinch and damage the young tender stems.

Place seedlings in their own clean container filled with moist sterile potting mix. Plant the young plants at the same depth they were growing in the original container.

Thin seedlings started in individual containers as needed. If you planted several seeds in each small container remove all but the healthiest one. Prune the weaker seedlings to ground

level, so the remaining seedling can develop into a strong transplant for the garden.

Continue to grow your plants in a sunny window or under artificial lights and water thoroughly and often enough to keep the soil slightly moist.

Soon it will be time to move your homegrown transplants into the garden.

Gardening expert, TV/radio host, author and columnist Melinda Myers has more than 30 years of horticulture experience and has written more than 20 gardening books.