

Purchasing seeds allows you to get an early jump on the growing season. It also opens you up to many more varieties than you would find in your local nursery. PLUS its the **cheapest** way to get delicious veggies growing in your garden (or herbs, or flowers...!)

RAISING SEEDS

1. Pick Your Containers

Ideally containers with individual compartments are ideal. They don't have to be fancy, you can reuse seedling containers you have purchased seedlings in from the nursery, or you can buy new large trays, especially designed for seed raising, that often come with a large plastic dome that mimics the "greenhouse" effect.



2. Seed Raising Mix

A good seed raising mix is quite important. It has much finer particles than standard potting mix, allowing for it to be tamped down quite firmly to eliminate large air pockets. You can purchase this from the nursery or hardware shop, or you make your own.

3. Other Supplies

A wide bucket or tub to tip your seed raising mix into, some tags or labels for marking your trays so you don't forget what is planted where, some gloves, and of course your seeds. You'll also need access to water.



4. Moisten Your Seed Raising Mix

Tip your seed raising mix into the tub and moisten it. It needs to be reasonably damp but not so wet that it is dripping when you pick up a handful. Watering your mix first means less disturbance for your seeds once they are in position.

5. Filling Your Pots

Fill your pots with soil to 2/3 full, and then pack it down firmly. It sometimes helps to tap the container against the bench or with your hand, just to ensure there are no air pockets. It should be down to about half or a third full. Keep adding soil and packing it down until your pot is firmly packed to half full. Now fill to the top.

6. Plant Your Seed

Make small holes in the top of each pot, roughly twice the depth that the seed is big. Depending on the size of your seed a pencil is often ideal to use to make your hole, or a chop stick. For very small seeds like onions and lettuce, gently pushing the seed into the surface of the soil is often enough. If your seeds are fresh, one seed per container should be fine. If they are a bit older, and you aren't sure how well they will germinate you might like to plant 2 or 3 per pot and thin them out later. Sprinkle more seed raising mix over the top of all your pots, to ensure your seed is covered.



7. Humidity

Cover your pots with plastic wrap, or the plastic dome that came with your trays. This keeps the pots slightly humid and helps with germination. Once you see the majority of your seeds poking through you can remove it.

8. Bottom heat

If you really want to trick your plants into sprouting quickly, give them some bottom heat. Most seeds germinate best at temperatures between 21 - 24°C (70-75°F) so placing them on top of your fridge, or on a specially designed heat mat this can speed up the process.

9. Watering

The best way to keep your seed raising mix damp is with gentle misting. Using a watering can is too forceful and can dislodge your seeds very easily. Similarly, once they germinate misting is often enough. The soil needs to stay moist but not wet. If your soil does manage to completely dry out it might benefit from being semi-immersed in a tray of water, so that it can soak up from the bottom, rather than a flood from above.

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10. Lots of light

Once your pots have germinated you need to ensure your plants are getting lots of light. Moving them to near a window, is ideal, but you can use some cheap florescent lights as an artificial source, for giving them "extended" light hours.

11. Thinning

With tiny seeds like lettuce and these thyme seeds on the right, it can often be quite difficult to space them accurately. As they are germinating and growing you may need to thin the plants so that they are not too crowded. Over crowded plants will compete for nutrients and water, and not do terribly well. If the plants are tiny you can often just gently pull them out without disturbing the neighbouring plants but as they get bigger you might be better off cutting them off just below the surface with a sharp pair of small scissors.



12. Transplanting to a bigger pot

If outside temperatures are not ideal yet for planting your seedlings into the garden, they may benefit from being transplanted into a larger pot. This is particularly important if they are not in individual pots - you will need to transplant them before their roots all start becoming entwined. Again, I water my potting mix well first, fill the pots half to 2/3 full and tamp the soil down well. Carefully remove the seedlings from their original container, keeping as much seed raising mix as possible around the roots and gently place it in the new pot. Back fill around the roots with fresh potting mix.



13. Hardening off

Once outside temperatures and daylight hours are starting to rise, you can begin to think about transplanting your seedlings into the garden. I like to harden mine off first by moving the trays outside during the day and then moving them back inside at night. I do this for a week or two depending on the weather. They may need extra watering during this time, as direct sunlight and any breeze will dry the soil out quicker than sitting inside. Depending on frosts you will soon be able to leave them outside at night as well. The hardening off process gradually strengthens the plants so they

14. Planting out

Once the frosts have past and your plants have been hardened off, they are ready to be transplanted into the garden. Prepare the garden beds ahead of time, by digging in any compost or fertiliser, and watering it well. Ideally a cloudy day, with no wind is best, and late in the day or evening is ideal, so the plants have time to adjust without being in direct hot sun for a day. Water them well - and watch them grow!



Check out my YouTube channel for my videos on making your own individual pots out of old newspaper and another one on making your own seed raising mix - using just three ingredients.

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