

Tips for Starting Plants from Seed

There are many people who love to start their spring gardens with seeds, be it vegetable, herb or flower. Regardless of what you're growing there are some timely tips you can use to save you the aggravation of the seeds not germinating. Purchasing your own seeds can be much cheaper than buying individual plants. A packet of seeds can cost anywhere from \$1.00 and up for anywhere from 20 seeds on up. Whereas purchasing one plant could run you from \$2.00 and more. So if you wanted 20 plants you are looking at \$40 plus. And that is just for one type of plant. Just think if you wanted 20 plants of 5 different varieties. This way would run into a lot of money. So, starting from seed not only is the cheap way to go, but it is a fun way to go.

Now for the tips:

1. You should already have your seed picked out and bought. Check out any catalogs you might receive or your local stores for what you are looking for. If you can't find anything, then do a search online. There are many very good seed companies out there and even some based in Texas.
2. Get your materials together for planting your seeds. There are many different types of containers you can use, such as egg cartons, paper cups, deli containers with plastic domes or you could make your own paper cups out of newspaper. Then you could purchase seed starting kits that have everything in them.
3. If you are using anything left over from previous years, they must be cleaned well and rinsed. Then they should be dipped in a mixture of 1 part household bleach and 9 parts water. Let them soak for 10 minutes. Or you could use Mr. Clean as I do which kills 99% bacteria. After soaking rinse with clear water and let dry. Wear rubber gloves during this task. Include any of your garden tools also.
4. Make sure you are either using new potting mix especially made for seed starting or you can make your own. I make mine by sifting sphagnum peat to get out the lumps and sticks with vermiculite in equal parts. Mix well and moisten to the point you can make a ball and water does not drip when you squeeze it.
5. Determine if your seeds need light or dark for germination. This link on our website will tell you which seeds need light or dark and the temperature they need to germinate. <https://txmg.org/orange/seed-germination-chart/> .
6. To help seeds germinate and keep the dreaded damping off disease away, I always add some cinnamon to the top of the potting mix before I sow my seeds. The cinnamon kills the fungus of the disease, which attacks the seedlings causing the stem to rot at the base of the plant. The fungus can also attack the seeds.
7. Sow your seeds based on the chart on our website. If the seed needs dark, don't plant any deeper than the width of the seed. For those needing light, cover with a light dusting of vermiculite. It will hold the moisture close to the seed while letting the light in.

8. To further help keep the dampening off disease away, mist with a strong mixture of chamomile or cinnamon tea in addition to watering with this tea mixture. ALWAYS water from the bottom. Make sure there is good air flow around your seedlings and the humidity is high.
9. When your seedlings have 2 - 4 true leaves, not the first set that appears, it is time to transplant to larger pots or move them outside if the temperature is warm enough. But first you must get them ready for the outdoors by hardening them off. Put them in a shady area, protected from the sun and wind for a few hours per day, gradually increasing the amount of light they are exposed to. Don't let them get too cold.

For more information or questions, please call our help line 409 882-7010 Tuesday and Thursday's between 9AM and 1PM. Our next Master Gardener class will start April 4, for more information call the number above.

Sheri Bethard, Texas Certified Master Gardener, Orange County