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**Preparing Successful Seedlings**

**By Judy Williams**

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Growing your own seedlings is very gratifying and far more economic than purchasing them. It also gives you far greater control over your existing growing conditions.

Vegetable seeds need a light, friable soil that will hold moisture, to grow. Seeds must absorb 40–60% of their weight in water to trigger germination. They also need air. When they sprout, they take up moisture from the film of water around the soil particles, they take up air from the space between those particles. So soil quality is extremely important. Compacted soil will not allow your seeds to sprout.

A good seed raising mixture could be the answer if you are unsure of the quality of your soil. Individual 'peat pots' are a great invention because the whole pot goes into the ground without disturbing the roots of your baby plants.

Warmth is also important to growing from seed. Most garden seeds will germinate if soil temperature is around 20C. For colder climates seed beds must be kept warm either by having them in a sunny protected spot in or near the house (like a porch or garage, out of the elements) or in a glass covered cold frame.

For most vegetable seeds you can expect a germination time of 6–20 days. In another 4–5 weeks, those seedlings should be transplanted into your outdoor no dig garden bed.

It's a good idea to treat seeds with a good, all purpose fungicide (something like a Rose Dust or Tomato Dust will be fine) before planting. Place a small amount, just the tip of a knife end, into the packet, reclose and shake until the seeds are covered. This will protect them from 'damping off', a common problem with very young plants.

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### Care of Seedlings

Seeds must be kept moist but not wet until the seedlings emerge. This may take between 1–3 weeks, depending on the plant type.

As they grow stonger, thorough but less frequent watering is required. They will need shade when young but should be increasingly exposed to the sun so they become used to conditions in the garden. Water in the morning rather than at night.

### Transplanting

Mark where you plan to put each of your plants. Use a trowel to make a hole large enough

to take the root system. Gently prise out the seedling from its container taking as much of the soil as you can with it into the garden bed. Firm the soil around the plant in its new position, cover the area with mulch and water in gently.

It is best to transplant in the late afternoon or evening to give the plants time to settle in less stressful conditions.

Judy Williams ([www.no-dig-vegetablegarden.com](http://www.no-dig-vegetablegarden.com)) splits her time between being a media executive and an earth mother goddess. No Dig Vegetable Gardens represents a clean, green way to grow your own food. The site covers all aspects of growing, cooking and preserving your harvest.

### **Tips On Starting Plants From Seed**

#### **By News Canada**

For many people, it's the preferred way to begin a garden.

(NC)–If you only draw on local resources of bedding and potted plants, you're likely missing a huge variety of plant types ... beautiful, healthy flowers and vegetables that are often only available as seed.

Many veteran gardeners prefer to grow from seed, for a number of reasons: A bigger variety of plants to choose from. Much lower costs, so you can fill a larger area of garden on a budget. Start gardening earlier in the spring. A greater sense of accomplishment. Just plain fun.

Gardeners who grow from seed also claim their plants are healthier and hardier.

Here's a brief "how to" guide to get you started:

Supplies:

Pick up a supply of growing trays and mini-pots at your garden centre. Make sure they're the kind that

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allow good drainage. Also get some sterilized potting soil – important to prevent seedlings being attacked by soil-borne disease or fungus. Another staple for experienced growers is No-Damp, a fungicide used on seedlings to prevent a common fungal plant disease called damping-off.

### Planting:

Depending on the type of plant, start seeds 4 to 8 weeks before the last frost if you plan to move them outdoors. If you plan to keep your plants inside, start anytime.

Nearly-fill each compartment of your tray/mini-pots with sterilized soil. Sprinkle a few seeds into each compartment/pot and cover with a little soil. Water well and cover each tray/pot with clear plastic. Store in a warm place.

Once the seedlings have appeared, uncover them and move to a sunny spot, turning trays/pots regularly.

Transfer to larger pots when the seedlings are 7–9cm (3–4 inches) tall.

### Moving seedlings into the garden:

Two weeks before you're ready to transplant, "harden" your new seedlings by taking them outdoors for a few hours each day.

It's a good idea to prepare your garden soil a couple of weeks ahead of planting, too. Tilling the soil early will fool weeds into germinating early, and you can then pull them to reduce competition with your

seedlings. When there is no longer any risk of frost, take the seedlings out of the pots and plant them into the garden. Use a special transplanting fertilizer such as Wilson Transplanter with Roots to stimulate root growth and reduce transplant shock.

Water regularly (but don't over water) and feed with a high quality fertilizer like PINK All-Purpose Garden Food. Perennials started from seed will usually re-grow larger the following spring, and spread rapidly if conditions favour their growth. You can also try harvesting seeds from your annual plants and vegetables (except for hybrid varieties) for replanting the following year. Dry the seeds slowly, and store them in a cool, dry place over winter. Then repeat the same planting steps outlined earlier.

Give seeds a try this spring. It's a great way to increase your gardening satisfaction ...and a good activity for children too!

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