

HOME GROUNDS FACT SHEET

CORNELL Cooperative Extension
Nassau County



Nassau County
Horticulture Program
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Sowing Seed Indoors

Sowing seeds indoors presents an interesting challenge for gardening enthusiasts. For many homeowners with limited space, sowing seeds may not be a feasible task, especially if sufficient light (sunlight) and temperature control is not available. Seedlings require a lot of sunlight, cool temperatures, good air circulation and humidity. If you can meet these requirements, you can grow your own vegetables and annual flowers from seed.

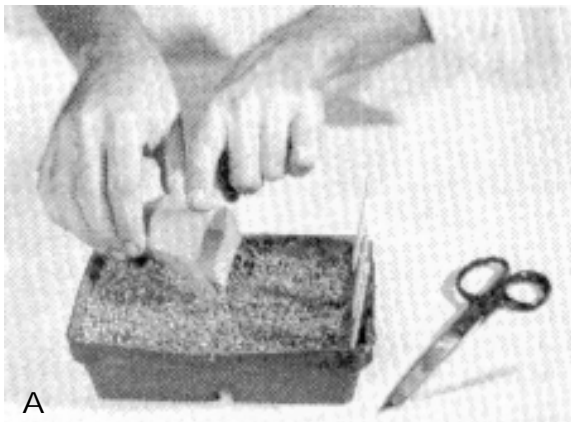
Most seed must be sown 5-6 weeks prior to outdoor planting. Some require 8-12 weeks. Most transplants can safely be set outside by mid-May. For more information on starting and transplanting dates for vegetables, consult the vegetable planting chart, Home Grounds Fact Sheet B-1-30A. In addition, sowing information can be found on the seed packet.

Almost any container can be used for starting seeds: flower pots, flats, milk containers or egg cartons. Any container you choose should

be clean and have holes in the bottom to provide good drainage.

There are many soilless type mixtures available for starting seeds. You can mix your own or purchase a prepackaged one that is "sterilized." Most soilless mixes contain equal parts of peat moss and perlite and/or vermiculite. Be sure to moisten the dry mix before sowing your seeds.

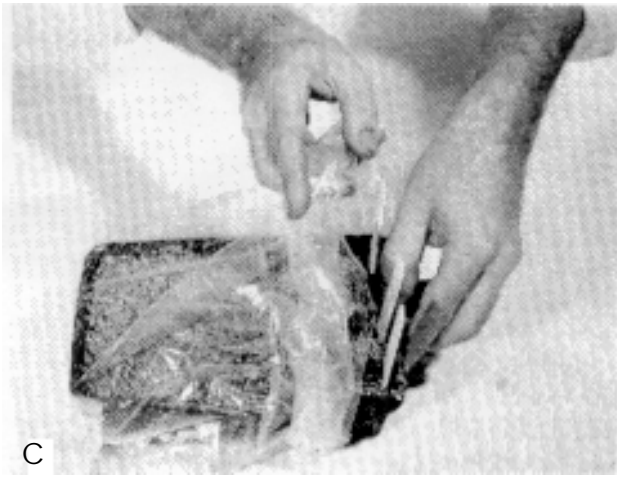
Now you are ready to sow your seeds. Scatter them evenly over the soil surface at the depth stated on the seed packet. (Picture A) If they are planted too deeply, they won't come up! Don't forget to label each container or row. Do not mix varieties in the same container. Pot labels can be used for this. Mark the variety and the date the seeds were sown. Wet the seed bed by partially submerging the container in a pail of water (so the water seeps in through the drainage holes in the bottom) or moisten them with a fine spray of water until it runs out of the bottom. (Picture B)



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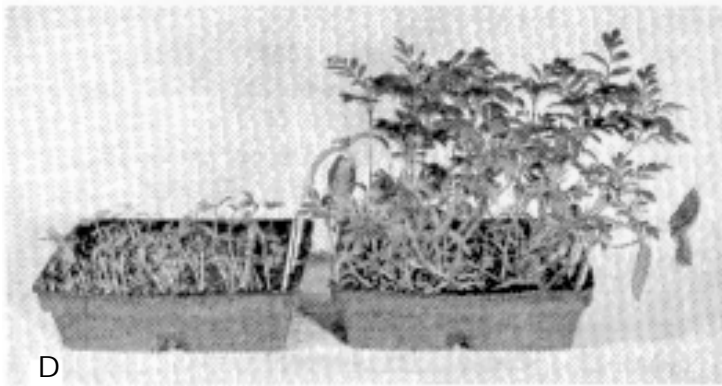
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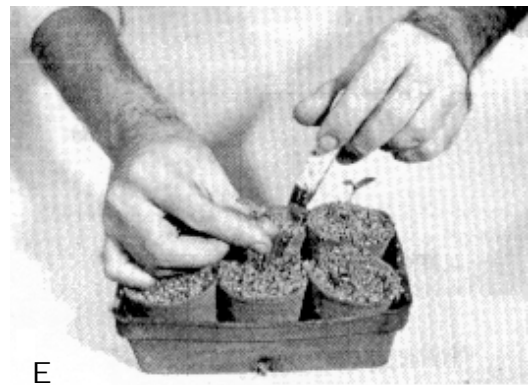
C

Place the container in a clear plastic bag in a warm area- 65° to 70°F. - (not on the radiator) and out of direct sunlight. (*Picture C*) This will provide the seeds with an ideal environment by creating a mini-greenhouse. As soon as the seeds show any signs of germination, remove the plastic bag and move them to a cool (about 55° night temperature) but very sunny window, or place directly under fluorescent lights. When using fluorescent lights, the seedling must be within 6-8 inches of the fixture. As the seedlings get taller, move the lights so they are still the same distance away. The lights should be kept on for 15 to 18 hours each day. Whether you are using fluorescent light or sunlight, it is important to check your seedlings often and never allow them to dry out. Fertilize them once a week with a starter solution of 20-20-20.

The seedlings are ready to be transplanted when there are two pairs of leaves present. In *Picture D*, the seedlings on the left have two sets of leaves, while the plants on the right have grown too large. Remove and discard all weak seedlings. The seedlings can be pricked-off with the aid of a pencil or pot label by lifting them from the seed bed to the planting container. (*Picture E*) Be careful to take as many of the seedling's roots with it as you can. The less broken roots, the better off the plant will be. Separating overgrown plants may be hard to do.



D

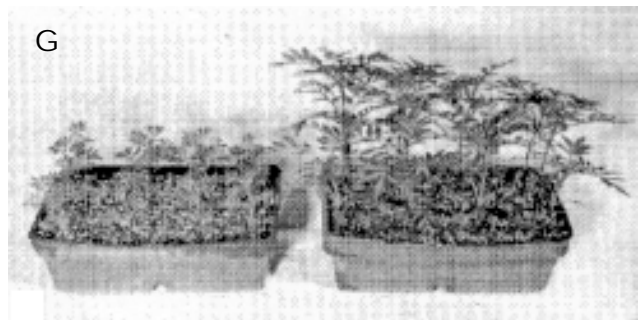


E

The seedlings can be transplanted into individual pots (*Picture F*), flats (*Picture G*) or Jiffy-7 expandable peat pellets. You can use the same soil mix you used for germinating the seeds. When transplanting seedlings into flats, space them about two inches apart. Gently firm the soil around the roots of each plant and moisten. Continue to fertilize them with the same starter solution of 20-20-20 once a week.

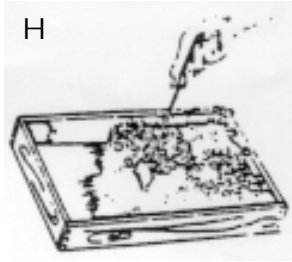


F



G

Seedlings must be hardened-off before they are planted outside. They can be set outside in flats for a few hours during the warm (above 60½F.) part of the day or place in a suitably insulated cold frame that is properly vented during the day. This enables the plants to gradually get accustomed to the temperatures. They will benefit from the increased sunlight and humidity.



In mid-May, the seedlings can be transplanted to your garden or landscape. When transplanting seedlings from a flat, cut squares of soil around each plant like cutting squares of a cake. The square of soil that surrounds the seedling will protect the roots and prevent them from severe transplant shock. (*Picture H*) This should be done about a week prior to transplanting.

With just a little labor and time, the transplants will flourish and provide you the pleasure of having grown your own vegetables and annuals.