



Starting Your Seeds at Home for the Garden

- **Step One - Timing**

Pay attention to your seed packets & the “when to start indoors” date. A safe average last frost date for the Omaha & Southwest Iowa area is May 15th (however some farmers & gardeners will disagree with this date), so do what you know works best for your site/garden. You will use this date, and work backwards depending on what the seed packet says.

- **Step Two - Seeding Equipment**

Determine how many plants you would like to start based on how much space you have to germinate indoors & how much space you have in your garden. This will help you determine what type of seed starting equipment to use.

Here are some options - seed trays with plugs, yogurt cups, seed-starting tray with cell pack inserts, single flat with furrows, soil blocks. Figure out which method you like best, but for starting out we recommend using cell pack inserts or seed trays with plugs.

- **Step Three - Soil Mix**

Find a good, organic potting mix or germination mix at your local plant nursery. Germination mix is a little finer than the organic potting mix, both will probably work just fine for your home garden. You need soil that is loose & drains well. Look for soil mixes that have organic fertilizer and/or compost in the mix - this will give your seedlings some added nutrients & the boost they need to grow.

- **Step Four - Wet the Mix, Sow the seeds, Cover**

This is key - get your soil mix moist before sowing your seeds. You can do this by pouring the mix you need into a large bucket and getting it uniformly moist, or putting the soil mix in your tray/cells and then soaking it with water. Leave it for a while, then come back and sow your seeds.

- **Seeding Technique -**
Read the seed packet, most seeds do not need to be planted very deep at all. Make a small indent in the middle of the cell or pot with your index finger, place seed into the indentation, push the seed down a little more if needed (according to seed packet). Dust with more potting or germination mix.

One or two seeds per cell is good. If there are two or more seeds that germinate, you will need to pull one out once they begin to grow, to allow enough space (unless you are sowing into a flat without cells). Cover your planted seeds with a plastic dome if you have one or plastic wrap, and uncover once they have germinated.

- **Step Five -- Sunlight**

Place your trays in the warmest, sunniest spot you have indoors. A table against a south facing window (where there is no draft) is ideal. You can use special grow lights or regular florescent lights if you like, hung at least an inch above your trays. Seedlings need a lot of light to germinate - at least 14 to 18 hours/ day. Keep that in mind if you are using lights.

- **Step Six - Watering & Care**

Once germination has occurred water your seedlings gently whenever the soil feels dry to the touch. Make sure you water them thoroughly so the cells are watered all the way to the bottom. If your soil mix did not have an organic fertilizer, consider adding something once your plants have “true leaves.” Ask your local nursery - we recommend Indian Creek Nursery & Paradigm Gardens in Omaha for great organic mixes & fertilizers.

- **Step Seven - Thinning**

If there is more than one plant growing in a cell (as mentioned above) make sure to pull out the weaker seedling. Brush your hand gently over the plants as they grow to promote strong stems.

- **Step Eight - Potting up & Hardening Off**

If your plants are becoming “root bound” or outgrowing their containers it is time to pot them up. Move them to bigger cells or pots. Take your seedlings outside when they are ready (refer back to the seed packet again - how many weeks did it say?) but keep them in a covered location like a porch for at least a week, and bring them inside the house at night. Gradually move them outside, and plant!