



Seed Starting

You've always wanted to start your own plants from seed. This is the year! Here is what you need to know.

Dates for Seed Starting

Plants should be the right size to plant outside after the last frost if planted on the following dates.

Annuals

- Impatiens 3/15
- Lobelia 2/20 to 4/1
- Marigold 3/15 to 4/15
- Pansy 1/15 to 3/01
- Perennials 1/15 to 3/01
 - This varies widely, see seed packets for information.
- Petunias 2/20 to 3/15
- Snapdragons 3/1
- Alyssum 4/25

Vegetables:

- Peppers 2/15
- Veggies: Broccoli, Cabbage, Cauliflower
Brussels Sprouts, Celery, Kale 3/15
- Tomatoes 3/20
- Eggplant, & Leeks 3/31
- Squash, Cantaloupe 4/15
 - It is possible to seed squash directly in the garden.
- Cucumbers, Lettuce, Endive, Spinach 4/31
 - It is possible to seed lettuce & other greens directly in the garden.





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- Buy seeds that have the current year stamped on them. Although you can save seeds to use from year to year, don't trust a seller that doesn't restock with all new every year. Not all seeds stay viable if they are not stored correctly.
- Unless you have unlimited space, only start plants from seed that need that jump on our Montana growing season. See our chart for suggestions.
- Compute your start date from the seed packet information. Our last average frost date is the third week of May.
- Choose a spot that has good light 4-6 hours a day or provide artificial light. Full spectrum grow lights work best and can be set on a timer to go on and off automatically.
- Use a spot that is warm and that does not get drafts from doors or use a heat source such as a mat to speed things up. If you use a windowsill, be sure it is not drafty. Cold can make seeds take twice as long to germinate and cold seeds sometimes rot before they can sprout.
- Start with small containers. 2 inch is a good size and you can transplant up to 4 inch or larger later. Be sure the container has drainage holes. Flats with clear plastic covers are great for holding moisture and can make seed starting easier.
- Use Seed Starting Mix® instead of potting soil or garden dirt. It is sterile and made for tender seedling roots. Moisten the Seed Starting Mix® thoroughly before you put it into your containers. Do not pack it too hard.
- Use two seeds per hole and be sure to plant at the depth recommended on the seed packet. You can thin the seedlings later. Be sure to label your seedlings.
- Provide even and constant moisture. Don't let the starting mix dry out. A spray bottle of plain water works great for delicate seedlings. Do not use household water if you have a water softener; the salts can damage the small plants. Use distilled water instead. When the plants are larger you can start giving them more water but always be careful not to beat the plants up.
- Do not worry about giving your seedlings food until they have at least four leaves. You can mix a water soluble food such as Green Light® or Miracle Grow® into your spray bottle water. Dilute according to label directions, too much can burn seedlings.
- Remove clear covers once the seedlings touch them. Exposing the seedlings to air movement helps to strengthen stems. If they start to grow toward light, rotate the containers for even growth.

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