



GARDENING TIPS FROM BLUE WILLOW AND LANDSCAPE ONTARIO

MAY

Starting Plants From Seed

What To Start From Seed:

Herbs, vegetables, annuals, perennials, and wildflowers can all be grown from seed in your own home. It's a very satisfying and economical late winter past time. It is also a great family activity that triggers a sense of wonder in children. The diversity of nature is particularly evident in this process because different seed varieties require different amounts of time to germinate and grow before taking them outdoors to plant in the garden.

Some even need special pre-treatment before sowing like chilling, nicking the seed coat with a sharp knife, or soaking overnight. Just as all people are different, so are seeds. Read the back of each seed package carefully to learn its' particular preferences.



How To Start Seeds:

The first step is to know when to start your seeds indoors. This information is clearly indicated on the package. If you start too early they'll become tall, leggy, and rootbound before they can be planted in the garden. Other seeds if started too late will have a lot of catching up to do in the garden. Remember that perennials started from seed shouldn't be expected to bloom until their second year.

Growing Containers:

You will need something to grow your seeds in. One of the easiest methods is to use a Parkwood™ Mini-Greenhouse Kit that consists of a drainage tray, plastic cellpak inserts, and a clear humidome cover. Or there are Jiffy Peat Pellets that are soaked in water until they have expanded to seven times their size. Each Jiffy pellet becomes a small growing sack with peat soil large enough for sowing two to three seeds. The advantage of Jiffy pellets is that you plant the seedling in its Jiffy right into the garden in spring so there isn't any root disturbance. This is also true of individual peat pots and peat cellpacks that are biodegradable. When you don't have to pull a plant out of its growing container, there's virtually no shock to sensitive roots and they take off quickly without sulking.

All these supplies and more are available at your nearest Sheridan Nurseries Garden Centre.

Soil:

The second item you will require is a soil that's just for seed starting. Choose a soilless mix or Pro-mix™, these soils are very light allowing fragile young roots to grow easily. They also allow



easy air penetration and they're sterilized to eliminate insects and disease. Don't use topsoil, triple mix, or houseplant soil. The first two aren't sterilized and the latter is too heavy a mixture. To ensure young seedlings won't succumb to a fungus disease called "damping off" (caused by too much humidity and poor air circulation) treat the soil at the time of planting with the liquid fungicide No-Damp™. Simply dilute according to the directions and water in. When you're ready to start your seeds, it's a good idea to slit open the top of the bag of soil, add some water, and let it stand overnight. Otherwise, the soil is so dry it's like dust. Fill your plastic or peat cellpacks or pots with the pre-moistened soil and spread two or three seeds over the surface of each compartment or pot. Lightly cover the seeds with more soil or, if specified on the package, leave the seeds exposed to direct light. Set your cellpacks or pots into a drainage tray. The Parkwood™ Mini-greenhouse has a plastic cover that can be put over the drainage tray. Don't snap it onto this tray. Rather, leave a small gap for air circulation. This is left on until the plants touch the cover, then it's permanently removed.

Light:

All seeds want to grow in warmth, especially bottom heat from being placed on a refrigerator or radiator, with natural bright light or under lamps that are kept 15 cm (6") above your seed flats. Be sure to identify what's sown in each flat by writing on seedling labels with a permanent marker like a Sharpie™ pen. You'll need several labels if there's more than one variety in a flat.

Water:

Don't allow your seedlings to dry out. Water them from a mister bottle when the soil surface is dry. Watering with a watering can gives too forceful a spray and will probably dislodge the seedlings and the soil.

Planting Your Seedlings In The Garden:

To plant young seedlings outdoors, you need to "harden" them off to ensure they can withstand fluctuating temperatures and wind. A week ahead of the May 24 weekend, place the trays outside in light shade for a few hours each day, bringing them back in at night. Each day move them into a bit more light until they're finally in full sun. If you put the flats in direct sun, the foliage burns and the leaves will have to be plucked off. To minimize transplant shock at the time of planting, use Parkwood™ Transplanter 5-15-5 as directed. Some seedlings can tolerate frost and can be planted earlier than May 24. These seedling will have the earlier transplanting date on the seed package.

DO start seeds at the proper time. The package states how many weeks prior to the last frost they can be sown.

DO use a special seed-starting soil mixture. It's light and it drains quickly.

DO treat the soil at the time of planting with a liquid fungicide called No-Damp™. It prevents a fatal condition called "damping off."

DO place the clear plastic humidome over the seed tray to increase temperature and humidity thereby hastening germination.

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DO place your seed tray(s) in a warm, bright location for strong, compact growth. Or place under fluorescent lights. For quicker germination provide a source of bottom heat, suggest putting seed tray on your refrigerator.

DO mist the seedlings often and water gently when the soil just starts to turn a lighter brown.

DO harden off seedlings before actually planting them by putting trays outside in partial shade for a few hours. Gradually expose them to more light over more hours until you can leave them out overnight.

DO try new varieties like 'Bright Lights' Swiss Chard, an orange sunflower called 'Earthwalker,' 'Peaches and Cream' Snapdragon, 'White Swan' Rudbeckia, 'Lemon Ice' Pansy, and the intense blue trailing annual Anagallis.

DON'T crowd your trays of seedlings. Good air circulation is a must to prevent disease. Suggest transplanting the seed tray into individual pots and thin out the weak ones. Use peat pots for easy transplanting into your beds.

DON'T leave the humidome on the tray after the seeds sprout.

DON'T start seeds too early. Seedlings become long and leggy as they hang around waiting to be planted.

DON'T place your tray(s) in low light as it results in weak plants.

DON'T take seedlings directly from the house and plant in the garden. Leaves will burn with direct exposure to the sun and wind and cool temperatures may shock them into sudden death.

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