Starting Seeds Indoors – The Basics

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Do your research
- A little information about Laramie (growing season, June 10–September 10)

Check out your seed info
- Catalogs (or online)
- Seed packets
- Start seed indoors or direct sow
- Note the days to maturity
- Note the preferred growing conditions
- Group seeds according to start times and plant accordingly

What do you need?
- Viable seed (not too old, still alive)
- Containers with drainage holes to hold the soil
- Growing medium (seed starting mix, etc.)
  that is hopefully disease free & has no fungus gnats
- Tray to put the containers in that will catch water
- Good source of light (artificial or natural)
- Reasonable temps – room temp, little warmer
- Reasonable air circulation
- Water (and way to keep moisture in until seeds germinate)
- Stuff for keeping track of what you planted (labels, tape, Sharpie)

Getting started...
- Get all your stuff together somewhere where you can be messy (put down newspapers on floor or table if you want).
  - Seed-starting “soil” mix (which is really soil-less mix and often consists of peat moss, vermiculite, perlite and maybe some fertilizer)
  - Containers
  - Seeds
  - Labeling supplies

Planting the seeds
- Put your soil mix into your container. Leave enough room for seeds and more soil.
- Tamp down a bit to compact it slightly.
- Sprinkle seed on top of soil mix.
- Cover with a bit of soil mix. (Check seed packet for depth; some seeds need light to germinate.)

Label, label, label...
- By some form or fashion
Next

☐ Water with warm water. Many people bottom water. Let soak in. Repeat until all the soil is damp.
☐ Cover with something that keeps moisture in.
☐ Place in comfortably warm spot and with some light (usually) but not direct sunlight or the seeds may “cook”.
☐ Monitor containers for signs of growth.
☐ When you see plants start to break the soil surface, move them to a place with good light.
☐ After germination starts, remove cover.
☐ Under fluorescent lights, keep plants close to lights (a couple of inches away) and keep lights on for 12 to 16 hr/day.
☐ Monitor moisture of soil – should be damp but not soggy.
☐ After germination, try to grow plants in coolish (but not cold) temperatures and brightish light.
☐ Raise lights up or lower plants away from the lights as plants get taller.
☐ The goal is sturdy, healthy seedlings.

Seedlings’ enemies

☐ “Damping off”
☐ Unfavorable climactic conditions
  ☐ Too cold, too hot
  ☐ Not enough air, which encourages disease and weak growth
  ☐ Not enough water or way too much
  ☐ Not enough light or exposure to light that is too strong without hardening off

Transplanting

☐ When plants are big enough – at least two “true” leaves (not first “seed” leaves); can also wait until bigger if want (more “true” leaves).
☐ Move transplants into larger containers or into the garden.
☐ Handle seedlings gently; don’t break their stems or they’re doomed.
☐ For containers, you can use a variety of soil mixes.
☐ Remember to label containers and make sure they drain well.
☐ Water with a weak fertilizer as needed.

Hardening off

☐ Gradually get plants used to outdoor conditions (bright light, cooler temps, wind, etc.).
☐ Put them in a sheltered area and gradually move them into more exposed location.
☐ Move in at night if frost is possible.

Hardening off another way

☐ Move plants outside, plant in the garden, and immediately set up protection over and around the plant.
☐ Gradually remove protection.
☐ Be ready to provide additional protection if frost is possible.