

Starting Seeds Indoors – The Basics

Jennifer S. Thompson & Amy Fluet

(March 28, 2015)

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.