



INDOOR SEED STARTING INFORMATION

Resource: https://sonomamg.ucanr.edu/Food_Gardening/Additional_KG_Articles/Seeding_Annuals_for_Early_Bloom/

Know your plants: Descriptions with examples:

- Annuals:** Complete life cycle in one year: sunflowers, zinnias, cosmos
- Biennials:** Take two years to complete cycle: Foxglove, Sweet William, Black eyed Susan
- Perennials:** Come back year after year, even though foliage may die back totally: Salvia, Alstroemeria, Hellebore

To get a head start on your garden before the last frost date on April 15, or May 1 in some areas, many gardeners like to start seeds indoors or in a greenhouse. By potting them up after germination, seedlings can be ready to transplant when the weather turns warm. Here's what is needed:

1. **A SCHEDULE.** Timing is important. Refer to the Sacramento County Master Gardener "Flower seed Planting Summary" for details on planting dozens of flower seeds.
2. **VIABLE SEEDS.** Seeds have a shelf life as well as ideal storage requirements.
3. **GROWING MEDIA.** Commercial potting soils provide proper water filtration and aeration. Avoid filling pots with native soil that becomes compacted and often contains pathogens.
4. **CONTAINERS** should be clean and sterilized to eliminate risk of diseases. Wash all containers thoroughly and soak and rinse in a solution of 1 part chlorine bleach to 9 parts water, to help prevent diseases from occurring to your delicate seedlings. Air dry.
5. **PLANTING DEPTH.** Follow directions on seed packets for planting depth information, usually 2-4 times the diameter of the seed. Very fine seeds may be lightly pressed into the medium and watered in with a mister.
6. **WATERING.** After seeding, keep the soil moist but not wet. Use a mister so as not to displace the seeds or place containers in a tray with one-inch of warm water in the bottom and, when saturated, set the containers aside to drain. Don't let containers sit in water constantly or the soil may become too wet and the seeds will rot.
7. **LIGHT REQUIREMENTS.** Once seeds germinate, place pots in a south-facing window or under fluorescent tubes or special grow lights. Plants need 16 hours each day under lights but soil dries out fast; be sure to keep the soil evenly moist. Once seedlings are well-established and develop a second set of true leaves, fertilize them with a half-strength, soluble plant fertilizer solution.
8. **TEMPERATURE.** Seedlings should be placed in a location that is about 65-70 degrees during the day and 55-60 degrees at night. Many gardeners use a heat mat set with a timer.
9. **HARDENING OFF.** About 2 weeks before transplanting to the garden, harden off young plants by exposing them to lower outdoor temperatures and humidity as well as slightly reducing water. Many gardeners move plants to an outdoor cold frame or shaded outdoor area during the day and bring them in at night for a week, then leave them outdoors for another week before transplanting seedlings into a sunny site.
10. **TRANSFERRING INTO THE GARDEN.** In general, plant seedlings at the same depth they were in the planting tray.

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