

Which Plants Should Be Started Indoors?

Tomatoes, peppers and eggplants require a long growing season, so they are almost always started indoors. Broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, lettuce, melons and onions can be started either indoors for an early crop or outdoors for a fall crop, depending on variety and climate. Begonias, zinnias, coleus, petunias and impatiens are among the flowers recommended for seeding indoors.

What You Will Need

Seed - Use fresh, quality seeds. Seedway varieties are specifically selected for high performance.

Soil Mix - Select a weed and disease free medium with good water holding and drainage.

Lighting - When seedlings emerge, remove the cover and move the tray to a brightly lit area. Fluorescent lights provide the light plants need.

Containers - Start seeds in a sterile container with good drainage, 2 - 3 inches deep. After emergence, use peat or plastic pots.

Fertilizer - As young seedlings develop, give them a boost with fertilizer.

The 10 Easy Steps

1. Fill the tray within 1/2 inch of the top with a growing medium. Avoid using unsterilized garden soil due to the potential for damage from diseases, weeds and insects.
2. Water the soil mixture with warm water. The soil should be thoroughly and evenly moist but not soggy.
3. Mark seed rows about 2 inches apart and sprinkle seeds along the rows. Cover vegetable seeds with 1/8 inch of soil. Some flower seeds require light for germination, so check seed packages for specific information.
4. Place the tray in a warm area and elevate it so warm air can circulate around it, or use a heating cable. Different varieties germinate best at different temperatures, but usually 65-70°F is fine.
5. Mist the soil regularly so it doesn't dry out. To prevent moisture loss, cover the tray with a pane of glass or sheet of plastic, or put the whole tray in a plastic bag.
6. When the seedlings emerge, remove the plastic or glass cover and move the tray to a brightly lit area. Fluorescent lights suspended 6 inches above the plants for 14 hours a day provide necessary light and prevent leggy plants.
7. Once the plants have developed two sets of leaves, transplant the strongest ones into individual containers.
8. Keep the plants in a bright location. Moisten the soil regularly. Fertilize every three weeks. If the light comes from only one direction, turn the plants every few days.
9. One or two weeks before garden planting time, move the plants to a cold frame or protected place outdoors for a few hours each day, while reducing the frequency of watering to condition the plants to the outside environment.
10. When the outside soil temperature reaches 60-65 degrees F and there is no longer any danger of frost, set the plants into your garden and protect them from the wind. Place peat pots below the soil level to prevent drying out. Water thoroughly.

