

## SEED STARTING

**GROWING MEDIUM:** Use a sterile potting soil. It's not necessary to use "seed starting mixes". Soil should be light and be able to hold water well.

We have used Mendo Mix, Fox Farm products, Sanctuary Empire Builder and Kellogg's Organic Potting Soil. Vermiculite is a good top dressing.

**SEEDS:** Use top quality regional seed for best results. Seeds remain viable for several years if stored properly.

To test old seed place in a damp paper towel, fold the towel over the seeds, place into a zip lock plastic bag. Zip it half way closed. Check daily to keep moist. After 14 days, count how many seeds germinated. If more than half have sprouted, the seed can be used successfully.

Some seeds germinate better after soaking in warm water. Some are peas, parsley, beans, and beets. Soak seeds with hard coats in a strong tea overnight. The tannic acid in the tea works to soften the outer covering of the seeds.

**CONTAINERS:** The container should be at least 2" deep with good drainage. Seed starting trays, six packs, yogurt tubs, paper cups can be used.. If starting in large shallow trays, timing is essential for moving the young plants before their root systems become entwined. To avoid diseases when reusing pots, clean by dipping into a dilute solution of Clorox and water. Meat trays can be used under the pots and used salad containers make good domes to hold in moisture.

**WATER:** Keep the soil evenly moist so the seeds don't dry out. Provide moisture with a spray bottle or mister or water from the bottom with a tray. Water can be dechlorinated by allowing to sit for 24 hours before using.

**HEAT:** Most seeds germinate better with temperatures about 50-65 degrees. This can be achieved by using a heat mat, placing the tray in a sunny location, or using grow lights. Later as temperatures warm, additional heat is not necessary.

**HOW TO SOW SEEDS:** Moisten the soil mix and scoop into flats or containers. Place the seed at the depth indicated on the package (the larger the seed, deeper planting) Plant at least two seeds in each section. Cover seeds with a thin layer of soil and sprinkle with vermiculite. Water carefully and keep covered until the seeds sprout. When the seedlings have two pair of true leaves, cut off the weakest plants and leave one. Move to a larger container when indicated without damaging roots. Hold seedling by the leaves when transplanting rather than the stem. Fertilize weekly with a light solution of water soluble nutrients. Harden off by gradually exposing plants to outdoor

temperatures and environments during the day for 7-10 days. Take seedlings outdoors to allow them to move with the breeze- makes for a sturdier plant. Make sure to label s

WHEN TO SOW THOSE SEEDS: Some seeds such as herbs, eggplant and peppers need a longer time to germinate. Allow 8-10 weeks before our last average frost date. Tomatoes can be started 4-6 weeks before our last average frost date.

US Climate Charts/ Livermore April 8 50/50% chance there will be no more frost

Soil temperature is important. If the soil and outdoor temperatures are not warm enough, plants will not thrive. It's best to be patient and wait until late April or May before transplanting into the ground.

Compiled by Tina Higashi