

Starting Vegetables from Seed in Northwest Florida

Benefits

- **Variety** Growing from seed gives gardeners the opportunity to choose from hundreds of vegetable varieties available from local gardening retailers, catalogs, and online sources.
- **Economical** Growing from seed saves you money! A \$3 seed packet can yield 5 lbs. lettuce, 20 lbs. carrots, 8 lbs. green beans, or 120 lbs. squash. One tomato plant can produce over 10 lbs. of fruit!
- **Quality** Growing from seed affords self-reliance; and with experience, gardeners can grow high quality plants for their garden, knowing exactly where their produce originated.
- **Satisfying** Successfully growing produce from a seed can be a very rewarding.

Supplies

- **Seeds** (Local nurseries, online catalogs, seed saving)
- **Starter trays or cells** (small paper cups, 1/2 toilet paper rolls, newspaper pots, etc. work too)
- **Spray bottle or adjustable hose sprayer** (gentle watering source)
- **Starting mix** (vermiculite, fine worm castings, sifted compost, fine perlite, etc.)
- **Butter knife** for assistance in transplanting from small to large pots
- **Labels** can be made from popsicle sticks
- **2"-4" pots** (milk jugs, soda bottles, etc. work too)
- **Potting mix** (peat, fine pine bark, perlite, worm castings, compost, fertilizers)

Tips

- Planting Depth
 - Very small seeds (lettuce, dill): need light to germinate, leave on surface
 - Small seeds (basil, peppers, kale): ~¼ inch deep or 2-3x seed diameter
 - Large seeds (squash, cucumber, beans): ~½ inch deep, or 2-3x seed diameter
- Label pots with variety, seed company, and date
- For warm crop varieties, keep indoors if night temperatures <40°F, until after last spring frost date (~March 15th)
- Germination temperature for warm varieties 75-90°F, cool varieties 60-80°F
- If seeding warm varieties indoors in spring, place flats in south-facing VERY sunny window or use fluorescent lights 3-5" from seedlings
- Mist with water, keeping moist but not water-logged
- Transplant to larger pots once plant forms first set of "true" leaves
- Seedlings like 12-18 hours a day, mature plants >6 hours a day
- Daytime air temperature ideally >60°F for warm varieties
- In spring, allow plant to "harden-off" by placing outdoors in partial shade before transplanting into garden
- Once plant is transplanted into garden, water frequently but gently, until established



Molly Jameson, Sustainable Agriculture and Community Food Systems Extension Agent
UF/IFAS Leon County Extension, 615 Paul Russell Road, Tallahassee, FL 32301
mjameson@ufl.edu