SEED STARTING TIPS

1. Always use a ‘seed starting’ soilless mix; it is lighter in texture, disease and weed free. Regular potting soil is not suitable, especially for small seeds. It is difficult for a tiny seed to push through and it may harbor pathogens.

2. Use clean, sanitized containers to limit pathogens that could be on old pots.

3. Read up on what conditions each particular seed needs to germinate. Many seeds will germinate more quickly in containers placed on a heat mat controlled by a thermostat. Some seeds do prefer to be cooler so consult temperature table for optimums. Some seeds need light and some need darkness. Be patient, some seeds take a long time.

4. Don't allow the seedbed to dry out, keep moist at all times. Cover with clear plastic, and do not germinate in bright sun as this could dry or 'fry' the seeds. Lift plastic every day or so to allow some air circulation. A small root that dries out even once may die. A mister can keep the soil moist but not soggy. Occasionally the top of the soil may look green and wet, but can be dry underneath. Check for moisture frequently.

5. DON'T OVER WATER! Seeds need moisture and humidity to germinate. If kept soaking wet, seeds may rot, roots may drown or tops may damp off.

6. If you are using a bottom heat source to speed germination of seeds, be sure to move the containers to a cooler area in full sun as soon as the seedlings fully emerge. For growing on after germination, 55 to 70 degrees are best. You may need supplemental light.

7. Water seedlings with warm water to prevent shock. This is especially important for heat lovers like tomatoes and peppers. Once the plants show a true leaf you can start using some liquid fertilizer but be cautious, dilute it a little. Watering from the bottom by setting the pots in a shallow pan of water using liquid fertilizer is a good practice. It is a balancing act that requires you to be vigilant especially when the growing conditions are cold and damp.

8. If your seedlings are getting ‘leggy’, long and lanky, there are three probable causes; too much nitrogen, not enough sun or bright light or overly warm growing conditions. Frequently it is some combination of these factors. The best way I’ve found to manage this once plants are getting leggy is to move them to a much cooler position with very bright light. A cold frame or cloche may be a good choice. If you think too much fertilizer is the problem, re-pot in new soil.

9. If seedlings are not bright green, or a color typical of the particular variety, they could be hungry or cold. Try a fairly balanced liquid fertilizer with micronutrients and move them to a warm, bright place. Be patient, uptake of nutrients does not happen overnight, it may take a week or more to see results.

10. If all else fails and your seedlings are not growing and do not look happy, my remedy is to dig them up and check the roots; they may not be healthy. If the roots look viable repot plants in fresh new soil. Water in lightly with commercial vitamin B transplant solution. Place in bright indirect light and a warm spot to recover.

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