

Indoor seed starting hacks and tips

There's a resurgence among homeowners to get back to the land, even if it's only in the form of a few potted plants on the back patio or a raised vegetable bed. You can get a head start by planting seeds indoors so they're ready to transplant outside when the danger of frost is past.



While seed packets share important information about planting depth and germination time, there are supplies that can make your plantings more successful, and some money-saving hacks, too.

Seed starting mix

When starting seeds indoors, use a sterile seed-starting mix. Peat pellets are also an option. Never use garden soil as it can harbor pests and diseases, and is too heavy for tender young shoots to thrive.

Grow lights

It's not necessary to spend a lot on expensive grow lights. For most home gardeners, standard fluorescent shop lights work just as well. If you want to save on your electric bill, consider LED lighting. Remember that fluorescent tubes are considered universal waste, so they are not accepted in most curbside programs. [Recycle your tubes](#), or check with your local hardware store — they may take unbroken lights.

Seedling containers

Instead of spending lots of money on small pots, try using old strawberry or blueberry containers. They've already got drainage holes and the cover creates a mini greenhouse effect.

Heating mats

Adding bottom heat to your seed trays will help them germinate more quickly and successfully. Heating mats made specifically for starting seeds are available, but expensive. Instead, head to your local thrift store and purchase an old electric blanket with a temperature control knob — just put a plastic shower curtain between the blanket and your seed trays to avoid getting the blanket wet. Set it on low and monitor soil temperatures — the ideal being between 70-75 degrees.

Plant markers

Cut-up mini blinds and a Sharpie work great — so do Popsicle sticks or plastic knives.

Water

When watering your seedlings, put them in a larger tray with water and let the containers soak up moisture from the bottom. Directly watering from overhead can wash out tender shoots and expose roots.

Getting started

Once you have your supplies, you're ready to [get started](#). Some seeds prefer to be planted directly outdoors, while others like a head start inside. It's hard to know how deep to plant some seeds, so follow the seed packet instructions. Several reference books are available on the topic as well. Good luck!