

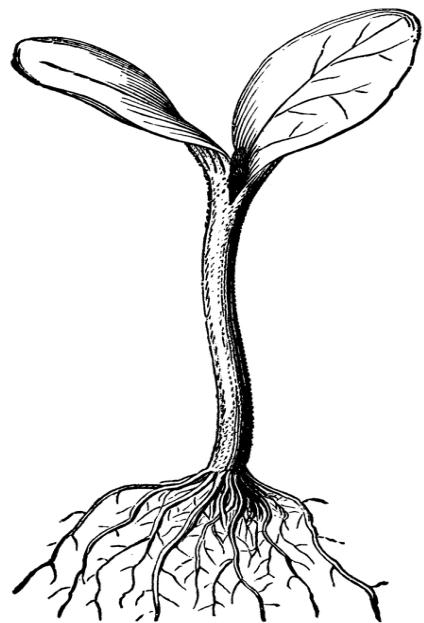
Starting Spring Seeds

Published 2/20/20 – Free download image of bean sprout from <http://clipart-library.com/>

Seeds are cool. I mean really cool! Ignoring coconuts and avocados for the moment, seeds start so tiny yet can become the worlds tallest and largest organisms. Or become tasty things to eat, decorate with, be used as building products or paper, or simply to just look at. Seeds are truly a miracle of life.

This is the time of year when some seeds need to get started, especially cool season vegetables, onions, leeks, and some hot peppers. Leafy greens like lettuce, kale, spinach, and arugula and some roots crops such as beets, radish, and carrots are best left to start outside in the garden. That job will have to wait for a few more months.

To quickly and successfully “start” seeds almost all seeds want to be warm and wet, almost all seeds do not need light to sprout, and after emerging all sprouts need light to continue their development. To accomplish this indoors, the equipment needed in order of importance are: a tray or pot that allows drainage, a top or cover for the tray or pot, a heat mat, a spray bottle, and a light. A tray with separate compartments for individual seeds to grow in is most helpful but not a requirement. Covers holds in the moisture and helps keep humidity constant for the delicate seeds and sprouts. Water proof heat mats help accelerate the germination process and some seeds like hot peppers hardly seem to germinate at all without the added heat. A nice but certainly not necessary addition to the heat mat is a thermostat. Spray bottles make it easier to gently add moisture without disturbing the seeds or sprouts by pouring too much water out of a watering can at once. Finally light will be required by the sprouts. The closer the light is to the sprouts the better, but a window can substitute for artificial lights in many circumstances. You can purchase a specialized seed starting table or you can piece together these items on your own. No matter how it’s done, all of these components are more important to your success than specialized seed starting potting mix.



Seed packets will have planting depth recommendations (space between planting will come later when the sprouts are put outside). The most common mistakes are planting the seeds too deep and letting the soil dry out. To keep the seed depth correct try filling the tray or pot with potting mix, wet the mix so water pours out of the bottom, make small indentations or holes for each seed at the recommended planting depth, place the seeds in the holes (skipping this step is not an option), then gently adding more potting mix over the seeds filling the holes. If the seeds have germination rates lower than 70%, and some will have that, putting multiples seeds in each hole helps assure at least something will sprout.

Heat mats can cut days off what the seed packet says for germination time. The same day sprouts start emerging, expose them to a light source for about 12 hours per day and keep the top on as long as possible until the sprouts start touching the top. Keep the soil moist and within a couple of weeks your sprouts will be ready to be put into bigger pots or in the ground. It's that easy!

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