

GROW FROM SEEDLING

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL GARDEN

Congratulations on your new baby plant! To help your little seedling thrive, we have compiled some of our favourite growing tips. Each plant has its own preference for temperature, water level, sunlight and humidity, but following these general guidelines will help your seedling thrive in no time.

Moving the plant outside/Hardening off

Plants are very sensitive to change, so moving into their forever home can be a little stressful for them. Many seedlings have been started in an indoor environment and thus have to be gradually hardened off before they are ready to live outside. Our seedlings have been hardened off already, so they have been exposed to full sun and wind.

If you are starting seedlings of your own, make sure to harden off the seedling before planting. Start bringing the plant out for a couple of hours, preferably not in the middle of the day, and bring it back inside. This period can gradually be prolonged each day until it can be fully moved outside.



When to transplant the seedling

Our seedlings come ready to transplant. The traditional planting date for warmer crops like tomatoes, peppers, squash and eggplants is May 24. This is because we usually don't have frosty nights after this date. However, pay attention to the weather. In 2021, we had an extremely cold late-May and many gardeners lost their hot crops. We lost some too! Be sure to check the 14-day forecast to see if there are cold nights coming.

Barring an extreme cold event, you can feel confident to transplant your seedlings right after you pick them up. If you are unable to transplant them right away, that is ok too. Our seedlings can last for a few weeks in the containers they arrive in, but be sure to keep them well watered (every day).

The best day to transplant your seedling is on an overcast, mild day with low wind. Preferably a few hours before a rain. That's what we always aim for! But if the weather isn't cooperating, you can plant them at any time. If it's a hot sunny day, just be sure to water them well.

When transplanting the seedling, carefully hold your hand across the top of the pot and tip it upside down with the stem in between your fingers. We do not recommend transplanting by pulling the stem because this could damage the plant. If the seedling is transplanted from a 4-cell plastic tray you can use your finger to gently push the seedling out from the draining hole in the bottom of the tray.



Choosing the right spot

Light is essential for the growth of seedlings. If you are planning on transplanting many plants in the same bed, remember that some plants like tomatoes, grow taller than e.g herbs, which means they might need to be strategically placed to get the most sunlight possible! In the northern hemisphere, your tall plants should be placed on the north side of your smaller plants. This way the taller plants won't shade the smaller ones.

Preparing the area

When the plant is transferred into its new, permanent home it is important to consider how much space the fully grown plant will need. We recommend looking up the individual spacing for each seedling to make sure they will have enough room to grow. You can download our Seedling Sale Menu pdf which lists the spacing requirements for all of the seedlings in our sale: <https://wheelbarrowfarm.com/the-big-seedling-sale>

If the seedling is transplanted into a growing pot, it is important to remember to transplant the seedling into a container with proper drainage to ensure excess moisture has somewhere to go. We recommend adding potting mix to the new container that has already been watered to encourage the roots to reach out for the water.

Planting

When planting the seedling, you can use the empty container to measure how deep and wide the hole should be for each individual seedling. Whether you are planting into a container or into the ground, you should provide fertility for your growing plant. It is a good idea to add compost to your potting mix or soil. If you are growing in containers, check to see if the potting mix you use comes with its own fertility.

Once the seedling is in the hole you've created, make sure to apply some pressure to the soil around the plant. This serves two purposes: 1) It creates a depression around the plant so that water is naturally drawn toward the center of the plant. 2) This slight downward pressure also gives the roots contact with the soil so that they can exchange water and nutrients. Too many air pockets in the soil can dry out the roots. At the same time, plant roots need oxygen, so be careful not to compact the soil too much.

How to maintain a happy plant

Water

You can stick your finger 1-2 inches down the soil to check for dryness. The seedling's need for water will increase with temperature and growth. Especially during the summer, it is best to water it during the early morning or late evening, as the heat will cause the water to evaporate faster. However, if it is the middle of the day and your plant needs water.... just give it some water! Watering at the base is always better than watering the leaves.



Fertilizer

All plants need nutrients to grow. The best time to fertilize your soil is before you plant. At Wheelbarrow Farm, this is when we fertilize. If you are noticing reduced growth during the summer, it is possible to fertilize midsummer as well. One method is to buy a bag of compost and top dress the soil. It is beneficial to scratch the surface of the soil with this new compost so that it can start to work its way down. You can do this right before a rain, or you can hand water after application. This helps get the nutrients down to the root zone. Another method of in-season fertilizing is a foliar spray. Most nurseries carry a fish-kelp liquid fertilizer that can be used to water the soil, or in a much smaller quantity to be sprayed on the leaves. We give our seedlings in the greenhouse a weekly foliar spray. Once they are in the ground, however, our plants survive on the fertility that we added to the soil before planting.

Trellising

Some plants, like tomatoes, cucumber and peas will eventually like to be trellised. The simplest method would be to use wooden/metal stakes and some string. The stake is driven into the soil 3-4 inches away from the crop. The string is used to tie the crop to the stake loosely for support.



Pinching

Some plants benefit from this special pruning technique, which encourages the plant to grow two new stems from the leaf nodes below the pinch or cut. This way you will get a fuller-looking plant. Basil can benefit from pinching and will make the plant produce more leaves.

Tomatoes have their own specific pruning needs. To maximize the fruit sets on your tomato plants, you should remove all “suckers” on a weekly basis. For a full description on how to do this, search for some tutorials on Youtube. But if you’re not into pruning your tomato, don’t worry, an un-pruned plant will still produce a lot of fruit.

Troubleshooting

Yellow leaves

It can be normal for a plant to get a yellow leaf or two. A plant usually sheds the oldest leaves, the ones closest to the ground, gradually. If you see a dead leaf, feel free to carefully cut them off so the plant does not waste energy on them. However, if all the leaves are turning pale green or yellow-green, this could indicate many things. Over or underwatering, or nutrient deficiencies are frequent culprits.

Insects or animals

Sometimes insects or animals manage to harvest some of the crops before we manage to get there. Normal insect pests are aphids, caterpillars and specifically species targeting insects. In the city, squirrels and other small animals can also be a threat to consider. We have done our best to prevent the likelihood of pests by choosing resistant varieties, and as long as healthy soil is encouraged that is a good start.



Especially younger plants are prone to attacks, and so a “floating row cover” or “bug netting” can help keep out uninvited guests, like squirrels and birds.

Leaf-miner is a common pest of beets, spinach and chard. Be sure to observe your plants regularly. Our method for dealing with leaf miner is to remove infected leaves as soon as you see them. After a few weeks, the problem should go away. Be sure to put the infected leaves in the compost and not on the ground right next to the plant.



Harvesting

Once the seedling has successfully grown into a mature plant, it is time to harvest. We recommend harvesting from the bottom of the plant first. This will allow the plant to continue to grow from the top and prolong the harvest. When the plant is ready for harvesting depends on the type of plant.

We recommend harvesting the basil as soon as the plants are 6 to 8 inches tall. The harvesting should be done regularly to encourage new growth. If you cannot use all of the leaves at once they can

easily be preserved by freezing them or by turning them into pesto. A regular harvest of plants like basil, spinach, lettuce and arugula can keep the plant in its foliar stage of growth and delay the plant from flowering.

The swiss chard can be harvested as soon as the leaves are tender and big enough to eat. The leaves can be eaten both raw in a salad or cooked like spinach. We recommend harvesting it as close to mealtime as possible for the best flavour! Cut the outer leaves first to allow the inner leaves to grow larger, that way you can harvest the same plant several times over the season.

Enjoy!

There is nothing more valuable and satisfying than seeing your plants grow from a tiny little seedling into a fully mature plant that can eventually enrich your meals. We hope you get as much joy out of these fascinating little creatures as we do.

Grow get 'em! We're rooting for you!

Your farmers at Wheelbarrow Farm

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