

The ABC's of Starting Seeds

It's almost time to pick up those plump bags of potting soil at your local retailer. If you've never started seeds inside before, this planting primer is for you!

A is for Annual. As bedding plants they are the best. Some of the easiest to grow include Marigolds, Cosmos, Nasturtiums and Sweet Peas.

B is for Biennial. These produce leaves the first year and bloom the second year. The flowers go to seed and the plant usually dies. Sometimes new plants will start from the seed around the base of the original plant the following year. Biennials include English Daisy, Forget-Me-Nots, Foxglove and Silver Dollar.

C is for Circulation. Most important to avoid the problem associated with the next letter! Set a small fan by your seedlings and direct a light breeze on to them for a few hours each day.

D is for Damping Off . This is the ogre of the seed sowing world. Lower chances of this fungus causing your seedlings to keel over by letting the soil dry out slightly in between watering. Don't sow plants too close together. Also, set up that fan!

E is for Enthusiasm. Maintain your interest and dedication to your young seedlings. They are dependant on you during this critical stage and daily inspection is important. Your attention will reward you with daily changes.

F is for Feeding. Seedlings don't need food at the two leaf stage but when the third leaf appears, they'll need fertilization. Dilute a water soluble fertilizer to 1/4 the suggested dosage and fertilize once a week.

G is for Greenhouse. The goal of almost every gardener. Rolls of plastic over hoops of re-bar will work as a temporary set up and someday, maybe you'll have a glass one with a potting bench and heat!

H is for Herbs. Try some of the simple ones like chives and dill. And don't be afraid to USE them this summer in your cooking.

I is for Identify. Don't rely on your memory to sort out those seedlings popping out of the soil. Label all varieties clearly so you'll know the proper location for them afterwards.

J is for Journal. It's a good idea to write down when you planted your seeds and to keep track of their progress so you'll know which ones to try again next year.

K is for knowledge. No one can be expected to know everything there is to know about plants. Research the germination requirements for the varieties you are growing. There are different conditions for different types.

L is for Light. Try your hand at growing beneath lights for even better results. Enhanced spectrum fluorescent tubes are recommended for placing as close to plants as possible. 400 to 1000 watt high intensity lights should be 24" or more above young plants. Lights should be hooked up to a timer - 18 hours on, 6 hours off.

M is for Moving Day. Take your time acclimatizing young seedlings to outside once the danger of frost is over. Just put them out for a few hours at a time in a sheltered area at first, gradually increasing this period over several days.

N is for nitrogen. One of the most important nutrients for green growth.

O is for Onions. If you are growing them from seed, start them now.

P is for peat moss. This forms up to 95% of soil less mixes.

Q is for Quantity. One of the most common mistakes is sowing far too much seed for the growing space. Carefully consider just how much room you have before you plant that whole package of broccoli.

R is for Root. These act as a storehouse for plant food after it is manufactured from photosynthesis or delivered via fertilizer.

S is for Seed. Available loose in packages, pelleted, on sticks, or in seed tapes - enclosed between two layers of paper.

T is for Touch. Prepare your seedlings for light winds by touching them gently.

U is for Ultimatum. Deliverance of a threat sometimes causes a reluctant tray of seeds to germinate overnight.

V is for Vermiculite. Provides aeration and drainage in soil mixes.

W is for water. The essence of growth, it kick starts life into being.

X is for X-Ray. Earlier this year, the potential use of irradiation in the US postal service to kill Anthrax spores caused concern to mail order seed companies but this treatment is confined to Washington destinations.

Y is for Youngsters. Involve them in sowing seeds. It's a far better way than puppies to show them how new life begins in this world.

Z is for Zone. Keep them in mind when sowing perennial seeds. Our hardiness zones are between 5 and 6. Anything above that probably

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won't survive our winter.

From Another list: Author Unknown: