

TOM'S GARDEN

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STARTING SEEDS

For some seeds, you can't just toss them onto the soil, water them and expect them to grow. It's Mother Nature's way of having a continuous supply of plants year after year.

When it comes to stubborn seeds, you must trick them into germinating, using methods that mimic nature. This includes light, darkness, temperature, soaking, nicking and a cold-wet treatment called stratification.

One easy method is to start seeds in wet paper towels or coffee filters. This helps seeds that need constant moisture and warmth such as hot peppers. They will sprout in about a week instead of 3 or 4 weeks in soil. You don't need trays or pots and you can see them germinate. This method works well for tomato, eggplant, cucumber, and other seeds, also.

You will need Ziplock sandwich bags, coffee filters or paper towels and seeds. Cut the filters or paper towels to fit inside the sandwich bags. Moisten the filters with a spray bottle and place the seeds about an inch apart. Fold the filter over the seeds to sandwich them between the layers. Spray again with water, you don't want it too wet, just damp. Slide the filter inside the bag. You can blow air into the bag with a straw or just leave the bag flat and seal. This creates a greenhouse effect. Don't forget to label and date the bag. Put the bag in a

warm part of the house, not in direct sunlight. Placing on a heat mat or on top of the refrigerator is perfect. Medical heating pads are too warm. Just don't forget about them! You shouldn't have to wet the filters again with the bag sealed.

You will see the primary root start to grow from the seed. Once it is about an inch long you can transplant the germinated seed in fine seed-starting mix. Sometimes when using paper towels the root will be tangled in the towel. If that happens just tear the paper along with the root so you don't damage it. Bury the root and leave the stem and seed coat above the soil. Don't try to pull the seed coat off, it will fall off on its own.

Some seeds need light to germinate, and others need darkness. The seed packet will give you this information along with recommendations for seed depth.

Seeds that need light to germinate include lettuce, dill, snapdragons, begonias, and impatiens. These seeds will almost always be very tiny. Just press them onto the damp fine planting medium and spray with a fine mist or allow the water to come up from the bottom. Cover with a dome or plastic wrap until germination.

Larger seeds get planted at a depth of 2 times the diameter of the seed as a general rule. Again, read the information on the seed packet for information.

Seeds with a hard thick coating should be soaked in water for a few hours before planting. Peas, beans, beets, sweet corn, squash, and okra benefit from soaking.

Some very hard seeds need to be nicked or scarred so the water can penetrate the hard seed coat. Some seeds that benefit from scarification are nasturtiums, sweet peas, morning glories, four o'clock, spinach, and moon flowers.

Seeds that are native perennials such as milkweed, clematis, coneflowers, pansies, and violets need stratification. That means they need a cold, moist period before they will germinate.

You can mimic this process in nature by placing the seed in a moist paper towel inside a sandwich bag and putting that in the refrigerator for about 2 months. Don't forget to label and date the bag. If someone gives you milkweed seeds, they must go through this process to germinate.

How Can You Fix Stretched Succulents



After a while, succulents can become a bit leggy and stretched-looking. This usually happens because of low light levels in the home during the winter months. Even a sunny window sometimes will not provide enough strong light. It is surprising how much light succulents need, although most don't need direct sun.

To remedy this problem, you must replant the stem. Cut the stem to a shorter length that will fit into your pot. It's ok to leave it a little long to anchor it in the soil. Sometimes there will be root hairs along the stem. Remove any leaves below the main rosette (these can produce new plants.) A new plant can grow from each leaf. Let the stem dry for 1 or 2 days so the end callouses over. This prevents rot when replanting. Replant in a fresh succulent/cacti soil mix. Replant with just a small stem if that's what you have. Don't water it for a week or so.



Place it in bright light but not direct sun to keep it from stretching out again. You can also put it under a grow light, LEDs are great! Only water when the soil is completely dry, about every 3 weeks. Put a sticky note on the pot so you remember when you watered.

It's as simple as that, just have a little patience.

*“In all places, then, in all seasons,
Flowers expand their light and soul-
like wings, Teaching us, by most
persuasive reasons, How akin they are
to human things.” ---Longfellow*

Fragrant Flowers

Mignonette (*Reseda odorata*) is French for “little darling”, and its fragrance is its fame, not its appearance. Each flower, like each person, has a story to tell- of its origins, history, family life, personality, and character.

Mignonette is a native of Egypt, where it was one of the flowers used to adorn the burial place of mummies. It became a favorite of the empress Josephine. As the story goes, Napoleon collected the seeds during his Egyptian campaign and sent them back to Josephine for her garden. She grew mignonette as a pot plant to bring its musky fragrance indoors. Its popularity increased and demand for it spread so that by the end of the 19th century it was found in almost every garden in France. In the south of France, it was grown commercially to meet the demand for winter bouquets in Paris and other large cities.

Mignonette is overlooked and dropped out of favor because outward beauty is all-important today and it is not a particularly attractive flower.

Planting mignonette seeds

Start indoors 4 to 6 weeks before your last frost date. The seeds are tiny and need light to germinate. Press them onto damp seed starting medium and keep moist under a dome or plastic wrap. Sow at 2-week intervals until early summer for continuous flowering.

Growing Mignonette

Plants prefer moist, rich soil in sun or part shade. Some afternoon shade in the hot summer months is helpful.

Height is 24”-36” tall. They can be grown in pots to be moved around on the patio or deck. Give them 9 to 12 inches spacing in the flowerbed. They have a loose, informal look for cottage gardens. Fresh cut flowers remain fragrant in the vase and dried flowers retain their scent.

A good source for seed is.

www.selectseeds.com



The Language of Flowers

Today, flowers remain a welcome substitute for words. Enhancing each gives message with grace and beauty. The January birth flowers are the carnation and the snow drop. The carnation comes in several colors that convey different meanings. A pink carnation means affection, while a red carnation means “I Love You.” A snowdrop signifies hope and Beauty.

