

# Growing plants from seeds

## Sowing directly in the ground

### Preparing your soil

Before sowing your seeds outdoors, you'll want to make sure the soil is in good condition. In the autumn, dig leafmould mulch or compost into the soil to improve its structure. Don't add rich compost or horse manure to the soil just before planting seeds as they may not germinate in soil that is too rich. Seeds have their own in-built plant foods to use during the early stages of growth. This means they don't need extra feeding initially.

**Temperature.** Most seeds will germinate very slowly, or not at all, if the temperature is below 7 degrees centigrade. You can warm the soil up by covering it with fleece or plastic sheeting a few weeks before sowing seeds.

Most flower and vegetable seeds can be planted outdoors from May. Some will be fine in March or April; for instance sweetpeas or edible peas don't mind a bit of cold weather. Check out what your seed packets say about when to sow outdoors.

**Moisture.** Although seeds need moisture to germinate, very wet soil will not do them any good, and may even make them rot. It's not good to work on very wet soil, as it can compact it, which also makes it difficult for seeds to germinate.

### Preparing your seed bed

Make sure the area where you are going to sow seeds is free of weeds. Get the weeding done **before** sowing, otherwise your emerging **seedlings** will have to fight for space and **nutrients** with the weeds.

Who likes a lumpy bed? Not us, and not seeds! Here's how to make your seeds lie in comfort:

- Pull out any bits of brick or large stones and discard them.
- Rake the soil so that the plot is fairly flat, and the top of the soil is fine.
- Seeds don't like too hard a bed either, so don't walk on the soil as this will compact it and make it difficult for the little seedlings to break through.



## Putting your seeds to bed

Once you've staked out your sowing space, you can make **drills**. These are shallow trenches for the seeds to go in.

Drills are normally made in lines, and then rows, but you may fancy being more creative. How about a circle of flowers or spiral of carrots?

- Run a stick through the soil to make a drill
- Water the drill
- Scatter small seeds or insert large seeds
- Rake the soil back over them

Your seed packet will tell you how far apart to place each seed, to make sure the plants have space to grow. Check on your seed packet how deep to sow the seed.



**If you are growing climbers, like sweetpeas or runner beans, they will need sticks or canes to support them. You can put these in place first, and then sow your seeds around the base of the canes.**

## Thinning out

Not all of your seeds will **germinate** so it's a good idea to sow more than you need.

If they do all germinate, you can **thin out** the surplus ones by simply pulling them out.

Choose the weaker, more spindly seedlings to get rid of.

Don't be tempted to leave all the surplus seedlings thinking you'll have lots more lovely flowers or vegetables, as they will soon start fighting for space. Less space means smaller plants.

Check out your seed packets again: they may give instructions on how many seeds to sow, how close together and what distance to thin to.



## Protecting from pests

Slugs and snails find emerging seedlings a delicious treat.

You'll want to protect your plants from being decimated by these voracious garden pests at all times. As slugs and snails are especially keen on small plants, you should try to keep these well protected. As they grow bigger, many plants harden up and become a less attractive snack.



**Give them a head start: sow seeds indoors, and then transplant the plants outside when they are bigger and stronger. This will give them a good chance to grow less tasty before meeting their enemy!**