

Flowers 101 – From Seed to Vase

Seed Starting Basics

Supplies for successful seed starting:

- Seed starting sterile mix
- Seed starting cell trays (preferred 50 cell trays), 10x20 bottom tray with no holes
- Heat mat (large enough for your 10x20 tray)
- Fluorescent shop light (adjustable)
- Plastic plant tags/pencil
- Tools to plant with are chopsticks, tweezers, finger
- Seeds, a container to hold them (white is best so you can see the seeds easily), scotch tape
- Spray bottle

To prepare the seed starting mix, moisten in a bucket or large tray until it is evenly moist (consistency of a wrung-out sponge). Fill your tray with the mix and press down gently until there are no air pockets and the soil feels firm. Another method is to put your un-moistened seed starting mix in your cell tray, add an inch or two of water in the bottom tray (depends how dry your mix is) and leave overnight for the mix to absorb the water. Spray the top of the mix before planting if it looks dry.

Choose your seeds and be sure to read the seed packet before you start. There is a lot of good information on most seed packets. Some seed packets aren't as complete, and in that case go online and research the plant before planting my seeds. Check how many weeks before your last frost date is recommended to start indoors and how deep to plant the seed. Spacing and height are important, too. Buy quality seed. It's worth it.

Shake down your seed packet before opening so you don't lose seeds that are stuck at the top. If you need to cut the seed packet, be sure not to cut off the name of the plant (I have obviously done both of these things).

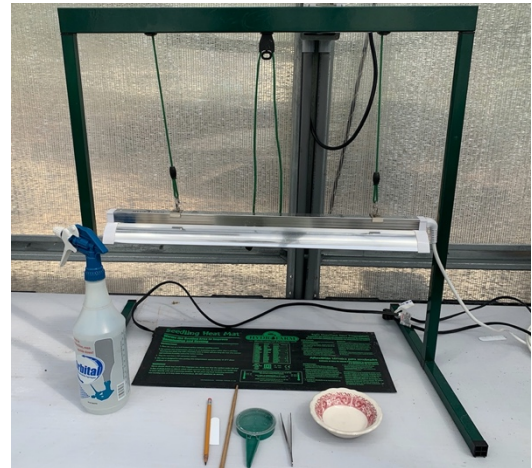
Before you begin planting, make your label with the name, the date and any other information pertinent to you (color, height, etc.). Insert the label (cut it in half to fit under the plastic dome) into the cell with the name facing out so you can read it easily. Open your packet, pour the seeds into your container. Make holes with a chopstick. If planting two to a cell, place at far ends of the cell so the roots don't tangle as much when transplanting. When finished with the row or rows, place leftover seed back in the packet and seal with scotch tape.

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Add water to the 10x20 bottom tray, approximately a half inch to an inch, and place the seed tray inside. If all the water gets absorbed add a bit more. With larger seeds, mist gently on the top to settle the seeds in. Cover with your plastic dome (one with air vents is preferred) and place on a heat mat or in a warm place. Check your trays every day. Remove the dome every day for a period of time if moisture has built up. Be sure the mix does not dry out.

Once the seedlings have sprouted, remove the domes and take off the heat mat. Place your tray under the fluorescent light about 2 to 3 inches above the top of the tallest plant. Use a fan on low or run your fingers over the top of the plants to strengthen the stems. Turn your trays every day so plants don't lean towards the sun or light in only one direction. Set a timer for your light to be on 14 to 16 hours a day. Good luck and happy planting!



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