

## Outdoor Seed Sowing

Good soil is one of the key elements of successful seed starting. If you are starting a new bed, first remove the sod. Then, amend the soil with compost or composted manure, both of which can be purchased at a big box store or nursery. Consider starting a compost pile yourself. Dig the organic material in about 6-8" deep. Wait a week or so for the soil to settle and new tiny weeds to emerge which can then be easily raked out. Loosened soil provides needed oxygen to the seed. Rake the bed smooth to even out the clumps of dirt.

If you are planting vegetables, use the Virginia Tech Publication 426-331 [www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/dam/pubs\\_ext\\_vt\\_edu/426/426-331/SPES-170.pdf](http://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/dam/pubs_ext_vt_edu/426/426-331/SPES-170.pdf) for the recommended planting dates for our climate zone 7a. Cold season vegetables (kale, chard, beets, etc.) can be started in early March). Most annual seed can be planted outside once the daytime soil temperature reaches 65-70 degrees.

Start with fresh seed from a reliable dealer. If you have purchased your seed ahead of planting time, store in a cool, dark area. Your seed packet should contain most of the information you need to plant your seeds, including the year it was packaged. Some seeds need light to germinate. Other seeds might have a hard seed coat that needs to be nicked or soaked overnight in warm water to hasten germination (scarification). The packet should tell you how many days to germination (sprout), seed spacing (although the general rule of thumb is 2 to 3 times the diameter of the seed) and any other pertinent cultural information.

1. Plant your seed in small furrows made with the edge of a hoe, a stick, or your finger. Make sure the rows are far enough apart to allow for full grown plants.
2. Space your seeds evenly at the recommended distance from each other in the furrow.
3. Cover the seed and tamp down lightly. If the seed needs light to germinate, leave them on top of the soil surface or with a very fine covering of fine peat moss or vermiculite.
4. Water the seeds in. A gentle sprinkling with a watering can or a watering wand should do it. Save the sprinklers until the seeds for when the garden is established. Seeds need a continuous supply of moisture to germinate and to grow.
5. Once your seeds have germinated and sprouted, you will probably have to thin them so each plant will be able to grow to its full potential. You can thin (prick out) once they have formed their true leaves, but it is better to wait until the seedling are between 2-3" tall.

Sources: <https://libguides.nybg.org/c.php?g=655025&p=4597421>  
<https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/extension-gardener-handbook/13-propagation>  
<https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-001/426-001.html>

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