

## STARTING FROM SEED

Starting our plants from seed is very rewarding. We can choose from the wide selection of flower, herb, vegetable and shrub seed that is available in catalogs, seed racks in stores, and seed collected from the wild or from your garden. Given the right conditions, most seed germinates readily, others can be challenging and require more patience.

There is great satisfaction in sowing seed, watching the seedlings emerge, and caring for them while they grow into good, strong plants that will produce the beautiful flowers, herbs, tasty vegetables and those delicious tomatoes and cucumbers that we all wait for.

Here are some tips for getting off to a good start.

- Use a soil-less mix, e.g. Rediearth. It is well drained, holds moisture and air spaces, and is free of weed seeds and harmful pathogen like fungus.
- Keep mix moist and use tepid water. Cover seeded flats with plastic to retain moisture. Be sure to check on progress every day and let in some fresh air to prevent molding.
- Broadcast tiny seed sparingly on prepared mix surface, mist in place and either don't cover with mix or cover very lightly with fine vermiculite or mix.
- Cover seed lightly. Seed buried too deeply may die trying to emerge or rot.
- Some seed prefer to germinate exposed to the light, others in the dark, most don't care.
- Soak hard seed in warm water a day or two for speedier germination. If for longer time, be sure to change the water.
- Temperature range of soil 60 – 80 degrees F with average of 70 F is great for sprouting most seed.
- Pre-chill some varieties before sowing, e.g. pansies, violas.
- Be sure to label the plantings with variety and date and keep notes on progress for future reference.
- Once the seeds have sprouted, they require bright light to keep them from getting leggy. Growing 3-4 inches under florescent lights is good. Cool white bulbs are fine.
- Seeds usually live for more than one year if stored well. Store cool and dry. Zip-lock bags or sealed jars in a cool, dry place are good. Seed longevity charts are informative and give you an idea how long to keep leftover seed. Charts are available from many sources and often give different viable life expectancy times.

## ANNUALS

Annuals germinate readily from seed. Most need a 6 – 8 week head start, others need more time to get a good sized plant to bed out. Here are some flowers that we commonly grow in Homer. The average soil temperature of 70F is good.

Light = the seed prefers to germinate in light

Dark = prefers to germinate in dark; cover with something dark, e.g. black plastic

Germ = approximate time to expect germination

Alyssum: Germ 3-5 days. Sow in clumps of 5-8

Bacopa: Light, germ 5-10 days, 8-10 weeks, multi-seed available, pelleted

Calendula: Germ 7-10 days, dark

Cosmos: Germ 5-7 days

California Poppies: Germ 10-12 days, light at 55-60F, care with transplanting

Dianthus: Germ 5-7 days

Dusty Miller: Germ 10-12 days, light

Flowering Cabbage and Kale: Germ 5 days, grow cool

Godetia: Germ 7-10 days, dark, grow cool

Lavatern: Germ 7-10 days, soak seed

Linaria: Germ 7-10 days, grow cool

Livingstone daisies: Dark, germ 7-10 days, 8 week start

Lobelia: Germ 10-14 days, light, tiny seed, sow in rows, transplant in clumps or sow directly into packs thinly as possible, or touch seed with damp pencil then transfer to pack. Start 10-12 weeks, grows slowly. Regattas and Riverias 2 week earlier bloom

Marigolds: Germ 5-10 days, grows quickly

Mimulus: Germ 7-10 days, light

Nasturtiums: Soak seed for speedier sprouting. Germ 7-10 days. Direct sow in packs or baskets

Nemesia: Germ 7-10 days, dark

Nicotiana: Germ 10-12 days

Paludosum daisies: Dark, germ 7-14 days

Pansies & Violas: Start 8-10 weeks, germ 10-14 days, dark. Pre-chill seed 24 hr, grow cool

Petunias: Germ 10-14 days, light, start 8-10 weeks. Pelleted seed available (Seed coated to increase size for easier handling)

Salpiglossis (Velvet flower): Dark, germ 10-14 days, fine seed

Strawflowers: Light, germ 7-10 days

Snapdragons: Light, fine seed, pelleted seed available. Pre-chill seed for 1-2 days

Sweet Peas: Dark, soak seed 24 hr. Sow direct to packs for 4 week start

## HERBS

Thyme, Marjoram, Oregano, Sage, Savory, Spearmint, Lemon Balm: Start 8 weeks, germ 7-10 days, light. Seed very small

Parsley: Germ 2-3 weeks, best in dark. Give 10 weeks head start. Soaking seed in warm water a few hours speeds up sprouting.

Lavender: Pre-chill in refrigerator for 1-2 weeks, then sow seed. Cover lightly with soil mix to germinate in light. Give 10-12 week start.

Rosemary: Start 10-12 weeks at 55-60F or sow in flat of moist soil mix, cover with plastic, then refrigerate for 1 week, then germinate at 70F. Germ 2-3 weeks, light

Chives: Sow seed in clumps in pots, dark, germ 2 weeks, 8-10 weeks head start

Dill and Cilantro: Start 6 weeks direct in packs. Plant more seed in garden.

Basil: Start 6-8 weeks. Germinates quickly and flourishes in greenhouse and sunny window sill. Homer nights are too cold to go outdoors.

## GREENHOUSE VEGETABLES

Tomatoes, Peppers and Eggplant: Sow seed 6-8 weeks ahead in 6 packs at 70-80F for rapid germination. Later pot up to 4" pot before planting in final bed or pot. Flower buds develop at 6-8 weeks. Days to fruit starts then.

Cucumbers and Squash: Direct seed in 4" pot at 70-80F for 3-4 weeks before final location or pot up as needed

## GARDEN STARTS

Cabbage family: Broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, brussels sprouts, kale: 4-6 weeks, germ 5-7 days at 70F direct in packs or broadcast in flat for later transplanting to packs.

Celery: Start 10 weeks, germ 14+ days at 70F in the dark

Artichokes: Soak seed overnight, start 12 weeks, germ 7-14 days at 70F. Pot up as needed.

Bulb Onions: Sow in dark in flat of soil-less mix 8 weeks before dividing and setting out. Need long-day varieties like Alisa Craig Exhibition or Red Wing, or onion will not form bulb.

Lettuce: 4 – 6 weeks

Peas, Beets, Carrots, Spinach, Chard, Parsnip: Sow directly in the garden. Garden soil temperature can be increased quicker by covering it with clear plastic or Remay.