



# Recycle to Start Seed Indoors

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To start seeds indoors, first be sure you have enough light. More homegrown seedlings are probably lost to this one factor than to any other. Vegetable and flower seedlings grown under low-light conditions will most likely be leggy and weak, and many will fall over under their own weight after they are 3 to 4 inches tall. If you do not have a sunny room or back porch with a southern exposure, you will probably need supplemental lights. A fluorescent, shop light with one warm-white and one cool-white bulb.

Use a soilless or peat-lite mix to start seedlings, since garden soil contains disease organisms that can be highly destructive to small plants. You can mix your own peat-lite mix -- 50 percent vermiculite or perlite and 50 percent fine sphagnum peat, by volume, is excellent for starting seeds. Fertilizer at half the normal strength may be added to the mixture. Mix all together well.

Packaging materials, both natural and man-made, can be given a second life by starting seeds indoors.

- Egg containers made of styrofoam and papier-mache are reliable, seed-starting trays. Punch a hole in the bottom of each egg socket, then fill with light potting mix. The lid becomes the bottom tray to catch excess water.
- Cut the bottom 2 inches from a plastic milk jug for a handy seedling tray. Punch holes in the bottom for drainage. Use the top portion as a funnel or outside as a hot cap.
- Make your own biodegradable seedling pots from newspapers. For a 3-inch pot, cut a three-layer-thick section of newspaper into a 9-inch square. Divide the paper into nine equal squares with a pen and ruler or by folding into thirds, unfolding, then folding into thirds the other way. Cut from along one of the marked or folded lines in each of the four corners to the fold that marks the center square. Bend the flaps up, overlap and staple them, and the seedling pot is ready for filling. Plants grown in newspaper pots can be planted in the garden, pot and all.
- Another method for making biodegradable pots is to cut strips of heavy paper, such as grocery bags, to match the height and diameter of the pot you want. For example, a 2-inch-square pot would require a strip 2 inches wide and 8 inches long. Add approximately 1 inch to the length for overlap. Glue the strips in circles to form bottomless pots. Fit these paper pots into a wooden or plastic flat with sides high enough to give good support before filling them with potting soil.
- Cut paper towel, bathroom tissue, or gift paper rolls into 3-inch lengths. Set vertically in a tray for bottomless seed containers.
- Make a mini-greenhouse from a milk carton, a plastic bag, and a wire coat hanger or other stout wire. Staple the carton shut and cut away one side. Fill with potting media, plant seeds, and add water. Cut the wire into 8-inch

lengths and bend into arches. Place three or four wire arches in the carton so as the seedlings grow, they will not touch the plastic. Place the carton in the plastic bag and seal. (Avoid using dry cleaning bags as they cling easily and could be dangerous to small children.) Keep the mini-greenhouse in a warm, bright location out of direct light. Open the bag daily to check on seedlings. Add water when necessary.

Peat pots can be purchased for large seeds and herbs. Sow 1 or 2 large seeds or 10 to 12 small, herb seeds directly in each peat pot. Thin the former to one seedling per pot, but allow all the herb seeds to grow together. They hold each other up and grow much better than if sown singly. When transplant time comes, they are strong enough to take some dividing, if desired. Peat pots may be planted directly in the garden; remove the sides and do not allow the edges of the pot to stick out above the soil, since they will act as a wick, and moisture will evaporate from this exposed surface.

Regardless of the type of container chosen, fill it three-fourths full with seed-starting mixture and sow the seeds. Cover to the specified depth and water the mix. If your home is dry, it may help to cover the containers with plastic wrap to maintain a steadier moisture level. Seeds and seedlings are extremely sensitive to drying out. They should not be kept soaking wet, however, since this condition is conducive to "damping-off," a fungal disease deadly to seedlings. Damping-off can be prevented or diminished by sprinkling milled sphagnum moss, which contains a natural fungicide, on top of the soil.

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