

GARDEN WITH US!

at COASTAL MAINE BOTANICAL GARDENS

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STARTING SEEDS FOR A VICTORY GARDEN

Recommended Age: Ages 3 and up

Length of time required: 30 minutes

Supplies needed:

- Seed starting soil mix
- Seeds
- Tray

- Recycled containers such as egg cartons (paperboard or plastic will work), plastic mushroom containers, small yogurt cups.

Steps:

1. Decide what vegetables and flowers you want to grow for your garden and follow the recommended guidelines for starting those seeds indoors. Johnny's Seeds has an excellent resource for helping you figure out your planting schedule based on your average last frost in spring: <https://www.johnnyseeds.com/growers-library/seed-planting-schedule-calculator.html>.
For example, since tomatoes require a very long growing season, start seeds inside 6-8 weeks before transplanting them into your garden, which should happen 1-2 weeks after your frost-free date. Since our frost-free date here in Boothbay is April 30, I would transplant them into the garden the second week of May and start my seeds inside 6-8 weeks prior to that.
Tip: With summer vegetables, there is a bit of wiggle room for transplanting some plants into your garden. For instance, in Maine I typically transplant my tomatoes and peppers at the end of May. Since the weather can still be somewhat cool in mid-May, these plants may not really get going until the weather warms. Other veggies like lettuce and spinach, however, are more sensitive to the heat, so plant them in a timely manner.
2. Choose which containers you will use for each type of seed you will be starting. How long the plant will be growing in your container determines how big it needs to be. Tomatoes spend more time in their container than lettuce or kale, so I would choose a larger container for them. If you are using plastic containers, poke several holes in the bottom of each—an ice pick or awl works well for this task.
3. Fill each container with seed-starting mix, a soilless mix typically containing peat moss, coconut coir fiber, perlite, and/or vermiculite. After filling the containers, push down to remove any gaps, and top off your containers to fill them—you want your containers filled to the top so that your soil doesn't settle too much after watering. Tip: This is a great activity for kids to help with.
4. Follow the directions on your seed packets for planting depths. For examples, lettuce should only be planted 1/8-1/4" below the soil surface. Make a small hole with your finger, add 2-3 seeds/container or cell, and gently cover the seeds with soil, pressing down lightly as you cover them. Tip: Kids as young as toddlers can help with planting—their little hands are great at placing small seeds into holes.
5. Place the containers in a tray and set in a sunny window or under a grow light. Water as needed. Soil should be moist until the seeds germinate (sprout). After germination, water roughly every other day. Soil should not be allowed to dry out completely. Tip: Make it a daily activity with your child to check on your seeds, and have them water if needed. A spray bottle filled with water is a good, gentle choice when watering seeds that have not sprouted. Once they sprout, you can switch to using a watering can.
6. Since you planted a few seeds in each container, you will need to thin out the seedlings once they are big enough. Once your seedlings have developed their first set of true leaves, carefully cut all but one seedling in each container. Tip: True leaves form right after the cotyledons, the first set of leaves to appear when a seed germinates.
7. One week before transplanting your seedlings into your garden, harden them off by exposing them gradually to the outside world. Increase their outside exposure by a couple of hours each day, and decrease the amount of water you give them. Tip: If you transplant your seedlings directly into your garden without hardening them off, the stress of exposing them to the elements too soon runs the risk of killing them.

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MAKING SEED TAPES

Recommended Age: Ages 3 and up
Length of time required: 15 minutes

There are certain seeds that do better if planted directly into your garden bed, instead of starting inside. These include veggies like beets, beans, peas, spinach, and lettuce. Some plants can be started both ways—the back of a seed packet should tell you what method of sowing is best for that particular seed. To get a head start on your garden for those seeds that like to be planted directly into a garden bed, you can prepare seed tapes. Making seed tapes is an easy activity to do with kids, and it makes planting your garden easier. It is also a great way to conserve seeds and makes spacing tiny seeds much easier than planting directly into your garden bed.

Supplies needed:

- Seeds
- Elmer's glue
- Markers
- Ruler or measuring tape
- Scissors
- Toilet paper, paper towels or newsprint
- Yarn or string

Steps:

1. Cut toilet paper, paper towels, or newsprint into 2" strips. The length of your strips can be as long as you want, but I recommend making strips no more than six feet long. Tip: I often find plain newsprint used as the stuffing material in packages I receive and save it for this purpose, but newspaper, toilet paper, and paper towels will work equally as well. If you want to make longer seed tapes out of paper towels or newsprint, simply glue your strips together until you have your desired length.
2. To add an artistic flair to your seed tapes, use markers to draw simple designs on the seed tapes.
3. Label one end of each strip with the type of seeds you will be gluing to that strip.
4. Fold the strip in half lengthwise to help mark the middle of the strip.
5. Using a measuring tape or ruler and a marker, measure out the spacing required for the seeds you are using, and make a mark at each interval. This is a great way for kids to brush up on their measurement skills. Younger children can make the marks on the tape as parents measure out the distance between each seed. Tip: The back of a seed packet will typically tell you how far apart to space seeds when planting and how far apart to thin them once they start to grow. We will be jumping straight to the thinning step by spacing seeds on the seed tape the recommended thinning distance. This way, we will reduce the number of seeds that are "wasted" in the planting process. Thinning, for those of you new to gardening, is another way of saying removing or cutting out.
6. Squeeze a small amount of glue on each mark you made on the seed tape. Tip: Too much glue can be bad for germination. You can also make your own paste with flour and water. Place 2-3 small seeds, or 1-2 larger seeds like peas or beans, on each dab of glue.
7. Allow to dry overnight.
8. Roll up your seed tape so that the name of the vegetable is at the end of your roll, facing outward. Use yarn or string to hold your seed tapes together.
9. When you are ready to plant your seed tapes, refer to the back of your seed packets for the recommended planting depth. Dig a shallow furrow at that depth, unroll your seed tape, and cover with soil. Tip: Some seeds, like lettuce and some flowers, only need to be planted 1/8" deep. In this case, it might be easier to lay your seed tape on your garden bed first, without digging a furrow, and then scattering soil on top of the tape.
10. Water seed tape after planting, and keep the garden bed moist until seeds sprout. Once they sprout (germinate), thin (remove) all but one plant in each cluster. Water as needed after that.