



Open Futures Resources

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Sowing techniques – indoors



Equipment required

- Seed trays
- Modular trays or pots
- A good seed compost
- Labels
- A pencil to make holes
- A compost sieve
- Either a watering can with a fine rose or a sink to stand the trays in. Also, cling film

You'll need somewhere to put these trays or pots after sowing. A windowsill is fine to get them to germinate, but after that crops have a tendency to become drawn as most classrooms are too hot and receive light for only part of the day. Depending on the crop they should be moved somewhere with better light and cooler temperatures fairly quickly after germinating, such as a greenhouse or cold frame.

Method



- After breaking up lumps in the compost, fill trays / pots and either firm down or tap the modular tray on a hard surface to settle the compost. If you fail to do this you will find that after watering only half the depth of tray/module contains compost.
- Stand the trays in water. They will absorb water from beneath via capillary action. Remove them as soon as the surface begins to glisten. This is gentler than using a can and makes less mess.
- Sow seeds according to instructions on the packet. Fine seeds go near or on the surface and larger seeds need to be sown more deeply.
- Cover the seeds with sieved, dry compost or an alternative, such as vermiculite.
- You can buy plastic covers to go over the trays to reduce water loss and promote quicker germination. Cling film works quite well as a cheaper alternative but you must remove it as soon as the majority of seeds have germinated.
- Keep watered, checking the compost daily. Once composts dry out they are difficult to re-wet and plants will always be weaker.

Pricking out

If you have sown into seed trays the seedlings will need pricking out – that is, lifting clumps out carefully using a tool such as a pencil, separating them and planting individual seedlings into its

own pot or modular cell. Always hold the seedling by its leaves, not by its stem, to avoid damaging it. The plant can always grow a new leaf. Watering the tray before pricking out will make this job easier.

Thinning

If sowing into individual modules, it is best practice to sow two or three seeds per module to improve chances of success. If more than one is growing, you must thin them out by pinching all but the strongest one out at soil level. If desired, you could prick out the extra seedlings (see above) and grow them on in their own pots/modules.



Hardening off

Gradually acclimatise plants to outside conditions before planting out into the garden to lessen the shock of going outside. Over a week or two bring

the plants outside for increasing lengths of time, initially bringing them back inside at night.

Planting out

- When planting out, always water the hole, let it drain and then plant into it. This ensures water is where it is needed the most (the roots) and leaves the soil around the stem dry, so lessening the attraction to slugs. Mix the water with seaweed liquid to help plants establish.
- Cover early plantings with cloches or fleece until growing strongly.
- If you are unable to put the young plants out when ready, consider potting them on into larger pots rather than running out of nutrients and space in a small module.

