

SEED SOWING AND TRANSPLANTING

In Central Oregon starting seeds indoors or in a greenhouse can give you a jump start on your outdoor planting. Select the varieties you want and have the plants ready when you plan to transplant them outdoors, 6-8 weeks after seed sowing. In Central Oregon, the growing season for outdoor annuals begins the first or second week of June.

Seed Selection: Choosing the correct variety for Central Oregon's climate helps ensure success. The maturity date listed on the seed packet or in the catalog should fall between 65 and 75 days, because of our cooler summer nights. When selecting varieties, many times the short season varieties are more realistic for success.

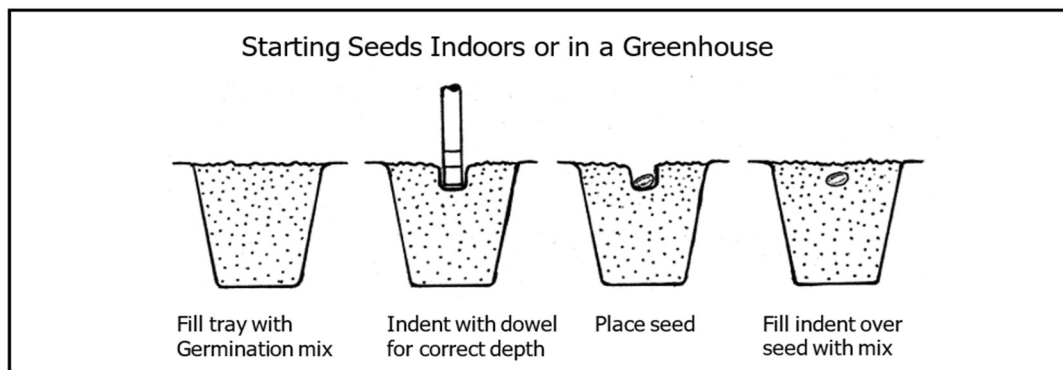
Starting Seeds Indoors or in a Greenhouse: Gather the supplies and equipment needed to complete the seed sowing. This would include: seeds, bin or tray 6-8" deep for mixing medium, seedling or germination mix, germination trays with drainage holes or small 6 packs (1.5-2" wide and 2.5-3" deep), hand trowel or scoop, labeling materials and markers, dowel with 1/4" increment marks or small ruler.

Combine seedling mix and water in the bin or tray. Add water a little at a time and stir until fully moistened but not soggy. Hold the germination tray or 6 packs over the bin or tray as you fill it. Gently fill germination tray or 6 packs by lightly patting down the mix as you fill it up to the top level. Smooth the excess off the top. In each cell of the germination tray or 6 pack, use the dowel or ruler to indent the top of soil at the center of the cell to the correct seed depth. See seed packet for correct depth.

Place the seed in the indentation and gently fill in the rest of the indentation to remove air gaps. Label seed cells as you sow. Record seed varieties, quantities, sowing dates and later the beginning of germination dates for each variety. This will be helpful for future planning or improvements as needed.

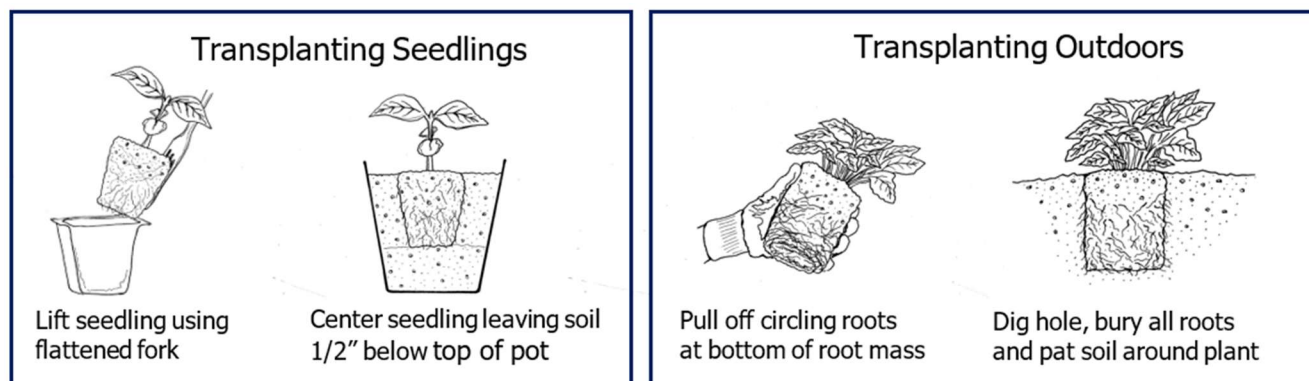
Water germination trays or 6 packs as needed to keep mix and seeds moist but not soggy. Use a watering can with small holes or hose with a mist nozzle attachment. Make sure the water is draining all the way through the cells.

Optional equipment: seedling heat mat or artificial grow lights. Follow instructions on the manufacturer's packaging.



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Transplanting seedlings: When you have 2 to 4 true leaves on your germinated seedlings you can begin transplanting into 3-4" individual pots. Label each pot as you go. Place potting soil in a mixing bin and add water if needed to be moist but not soggy. Fill the lower 1/3 of the 3-4" pot with the moist soil. Use a flattened stainless-steel fork and insert it straight down the side of the cell. Gently lift out the seedling by holding onto the leaves and not the stem. Inspect the root mass before transplanting. If there is very little root mass proceed with transplanting. While holding the seedling over the center of the pot with 2 fingers, fill in more soil with your other hand. If the seedling roots are compacted, gently massage the root ball and pull off some of the lower roots. Make sure the soil is at the same level on the plant that it was in the germination tray or small 6 pack. Leave soil approx. 1/2" below the top inside edge of the 3-4" pot to allow room for water. Water transplants.



Transplanting outdoors: When you are ready to transplant your plants outside, harden off your plants over a week's period-of-time exposing them to a little more sunlight and wind each day. After plants have been hardened off, proceed with planting outside. Check the root mass to see if it needs massaging. If it has circling roots, pull off the bottom of the root mass. Dig a hole with a hand trowel or spade deep enough to bury all the roots. Pat down the soil around the plant.

Storing Seeds: Keep excess seeds in a labeled container or envelope in a cool, dry place. Storage life of seeds varies widely from 1-5 years or longer if stored properly.

Testing Seeds for Viability: Spread 10 seeds between a dampened paper towel and cover with plastic wrap or bag. Put in a warm place. Keep paper towel moist until seeds germinate. If 5 seeds germinate within the expected time frame, you would have 50% germination. Continue applying water a few days longer to see if a few more seeds germinate. Evaluate whether-or-not it is worthwhile using the old seeds or buying new ones. Note that seeds that germinate in the paper towel can be planted.

For More Information See OSU Extension Publications:

Growing Vegetables in Central Oregon (EM 9128) revised November 2019

<https://extension.oregonstate.edu/pub/em-9128>

Collecting and Storing Seeds from Your Garden (FS 220) May 2003

<https://extension.oregonstate.edu/gardening/techniques/collecting-storing-seeds-your-garden>

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Hardening Off Isn't Hard To Do!

“Hardening off” isn't difficult to do, it just takes some time.

Hardening off refers to the process of acclimating plants from either indoor growing or greenhouse conditions or newly purchased plants from stores. These plants have been protected from bright full sun and windy conditions and need to be introduced to the elements of full sun and wind gradually.

Initially, place the plants outdoors in an area that is semi-shaded and protected from wind starting with 1 hour the first day. The second day, expose the plants for 2 hours. The third day, expose the plants for 3 hours. Continue increasing the hours per day of exposure to sun and wind for 6-8 days. After 6-8 days, these plants will be ready for the outdoor life. As part of the acclimating process, you will also gradually cut back on watering without letting the soil dry out completely, which allows the plants to toughen up and be prepared for transplanting.

Transplant on a cloudy day if possible. Gently massage the root mass before transplanting into the soil and water the plants with a weak solution of fertilizer. Gently press the soil around the newly transplanted plants to remove air pockets.

In Central Oregon, the average last day of frost is about June 1st. This can vary considerably, so delay transplanting or be ready to protect the plants with either row cover, walls 'o water or other barriers that can help with this problem.