

## Why Start Your Own Seeds?

- **Selection, selection, selection.** Nurseries tend to stock common varieties.
- **Earlier harvests and blooms.** Jump-start the season and enjoy sooner.
- **More for less.** A flat of plants costs many times more than a packet of seeds.
- **Organic guaranteed.** Grow your own so there's no worry about chemicals.



## When To Start Seeds Indoors?

Seed packages identify how many weeks ahead of average last frost date to start the seeds. Count back from that frost date for each type of seed.

**LONDON ONTARIO – AVERAGE LAST SPRING FROST → MAY 10**

Harden off 1-2 weeks after this date and keep a close eye on the night temperatures. Late May is usually safe for planting out.

## Recommended # of Weeks to Start Seeds, Prior to Frost Free Date

Vegetable	# Weeks	Flowers	# Weeks	Herbs	# Weeks
Artichoke	10-12	Ageratum	6-8	Basil	6-8
Broccoli	5-7	Alyssum	8-12	Catnip	8-12
Brussels	5-7	Bachelor	4-6	Chamomile	8-12
Sprouts		Button			
Cabbage	5-7	Calendula	6-8	Chervil	6-8
Cantaloupe	3-4	Coleus	12-14	Chives	12-14
Cauliflower	5-7	Dahlia	4-6	Coriander	6-8
Celery	7-12	Daisy	6-8	Dill	6-8
Chinese Cabbage	5-7	Fuchsia	18-20	Feverfew	8-12
Collards	5-7	Godetia	4-6	Lemon Balm	6-8
Cucumbers	3-4	Impatiens	12-14	Mint	12-14
Eggplant	6-8	Lobelia	12-14	Oregano	12-14
Kale	4-6	Marigold	5-6	Parsley	12-14
Leeks	10-12	Nasturtium	4-6	Sage	6-8
Lettuce	5-7	Nemesia	6-8	Savory	6-8
Okra	2-4	Pansy	12-14	Thyme	8-12
Onion	10-12	Petunia	8-12		
Pepper	8-10	Poppy	12-14		
Pumpkin	2-4	Snapdragon	8-12		
Spinach	6-8	Sweet Pea	8-12		
Squash	3-4	Zinnia	5-6		
Swiss Chard	6-8				
Tomato	6-8				
Watermelon	5-7				

**Note 1 - Don't sow too early.** This is Rule number one per Yvonne Cunningham in her Seed-Starting Basics article [canadiangardening.com/how-to/seeds/eight-seed-starting-basics](http://canadiangardening.com/how-to/seeds/eight-seed-starting-basics) Your plants will be leggy and overgrown long before you can transplant them. If the seed packet recommends sowing four to six weeks before the last frost date, choose the four.

**Note 2 - Many things can be direct-seeded into planting beds rather than starting indoors, for example:**

- **March** (as soon as soil can be worked): Asparagus, Carrots, Onion sets, Radish, Turnip, Spinach, Peas, Parsnip
- **April:** Beets, Brussel Sprouts, Swiss Chard, Leeks, Lettuce, Potatoes
- **May:** Beans, Pumpkin, Squash, Corn, Watermelon

## Top 10 Tips for Starting Seeds

### 1. Choose Wisely

- Research in the winter to choose the right seeds and work out details of timing and transplanting. Use catalogs that specialize in plants for your region. Keep your catalogs for reference.
- Decide between hybrids and open-pollinated cultivars. Hybrids may produce earlier harvests and higher yields, but open-pollinated cultivars may taste better, produce longer and cost less.
- Avoid seeds treated with synthetic chemical fungicide. When ordering, specify untreated seeds.
- Choose cultivars for size, habit, and tolerance of your soil conditions.
- Some **sure bets for** home germination →
  - Edibles - basil, broccoli, brussel sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, chives, leeks, lettuce, onions, peppers and tomatoes.
  - Annuals - alyssum, cosmos, marigolds and zinnias.
  - Perennials - Shasta daisies, columbines and hollyhocks.

**2. Get the timing down** - Calculate when to sow and transplant using area frost dates as a guideline.

**3. Gather CLEAN containers** - anything 5-8cms (2-3 inches) deep with holes for drainage will do. Clean by washing in hot soapy water and rinsing with a 10% solution of household bleach and water (or white vinegar)

**4. Use seed-starter mix (NOT potting soil)** or make your own (equal parts of perlite, vermiculite, and peat with a 1/4 teaspoon of lime for each 'armful' to neutralize the acidity of the peat).

**5. Sow carefully** per the directions - Sow more finicky transplants into large containers or directly into garden after frost risk is past (e.g. lettuce, melons, cucumbers). Moisten your medium before sowing. Drop seeds onto the surface, spacing as evenly as possible. Cover the seeds to a depth mentioned on packet or about three times the thickness of the seeds. Some should not be covered at all because they need light to germinate. Top it off with lightly sprinkled milled sphagnum moss, a natural fungicide, to protect against damping-off, a fungal disease that rots seeds and seedlings.

**6. Keep seeds cozy and moist** - Cover flats with plastic wrap or glass to keep the environment humid and place them near a heat vent or on a heat mat made for seed starting. Most seeds germinate well at about 21-24°C (70-75 °F). Mist with a spray bottle or set the trays into water so the mix wicks up the moisture.

**7. Provide LOTS of light** – After germination, uncover and move the containers to a bright spot—ideally 5 cms (2 inches) beneath fluorescent lights (NOT incandescent). Rotate seedlings at the edges into the middle every few days. Keep the tubes clean to maximize light available. Provide 12-16 hours of light per day.

**8. Treat seedlings to food and cooler temperatures** 10-15 ° C (50-60 °F) - Begin to fertilize with a half-strength solution every week or two of fish or seaweed fertilizer, compost tea, or one of the liquid organic fertilizers specially formulated for seedlings. Do this AFTER they get their first true leaves which emerge after the little, round cotyledon leaves.

**9. Give them room** – to avoid becoming root-bound or weak growth, thin seedlings and repot into larger containers with a mix that includes compost. Gently use a narrow fork or flat stick to lift the seedlings and handle only by leaves or roots to avoid damaging fragile stems.

**10. Toughen them up** - Lightly brush seedlings with your hand often each day to help them grow stocky and strong or set up a small fan to gently, continuously blow on them. Start acclimatizing them outdoors (hardening off) 1-2 weeks before the plants are to go into the garden. On a warm spring day, place containers in a shaded, protected place, such as a porch, for a few hours. Each day—unless the weather is horrible—gradually increase exposure to sun and breeze.