



Seed Starting For Successful Growing

Getting your plants off to a good start is extremely important. How you start your seeds will affect the strength and size of the mature plant, as well as its ability to produce a good harvest. The exact conditions required can vary greatly depending on what you are growing, so it is important to follow the specific instructions on each individual packet of seeds. It can also be helpful to do a little research into what different types of plant really love. The following instructions are a general guideline which will work well for a wide variety of seeds. Always feel free to contact the Earth Connections team with any questions about your specific set up.

1) Set up your seed-starting station.

Select a location for your seeds that won't be exposed to extreme temperatures, and that has access to an electrical outlet. Follow the directions included with the universal light stand to set it up and attach your grow light. Put it in place above your heat mat.

2) Expand your peat pucks.

Arrange the peat pucks in your grow tray with the opening in the mesh facing up. You will be able to fit 55 pucks in one tray...10 rows of 5. Pour about 1 inch of water into the tray, and allow the pucks to expand. You can add fertilizer to the water used to soak the peat moss if you desire...this can give your new plants an extra boost for early growing. It can take up to an hour for full expansion, and you might need to add a bit more water to some pucks. Occasionally a very tightly compressed puck will need a bit of gentle squeezing to get it going. Time saving tip: Some people find it convenient to add water to their pucks the day before they plan on starting their seeds and leave them overnight.

3) Plant your seeds.

Fluff up each peat puck and pull open the mesh to expose the top surface. Press a finger into the peat moss to make a hole for your seed, following the instructions on each seed packet for how deep to plant. Most seeds do well about a 0.5 - 1 cm deep. In general you should plant 1 or 2 seeds per puck, depending on the size of the seed. Some herbs and other plants with tiny seeds can be more densely planted.

4) Place them in their ideal environment.

Put the tray on top of your heat mat and turn it on. Cover your tray with a clear dome to prevent your seeds from drying out too quickly. Seeds need consistent moisture for germination, and young seedlings are easily wilted before their roots are fully established. Check on your seeds daily, and water as needed to keep the soil damp, but not soggy. To begin with, use the shortest dome you have and position

your grow light as low as possible. Keeping the light close will encourage thick, strong stems and discourage the seedlings from stretching out to reach the light. If possible, the light should remain on for 12-16 hours each day.

Note: Some seeds have very different germination requirements, such as complete darkness or cool temperatures. Always follow seed packet instructions, and start seeds that prefer a different environment in a separate tray.

5) **Watch them grow!**

Once the seeds have germinated and the seedlings have their first leaves, you can turn off the heat mat. Without the heat, the peat pucks will not dry out as quickly and you may need to water less frequently. You may decide to remove the clear dome to allow for more air circulation at least part of the day. Too much moisture can result in mold, however, it can still be helpful to keep things covered part of the time such as overnight to prevent accidental wilting or plant loss due to over-drying. This will depend on your individual conditions and may require some trial and error. Switch to a taller dome if you find plants still need some cover as they get taller. Raise the grow light to accommodate the height of your plants, always keeping it as close to the tops of the plants as possible.

6) **When to transplant?**

As a general rule, you can transplant when the seedlings have 3 or 4 "true" leaves (leaves which come after the first pair and resemble how the leaves of the mature plant are supposed to look). Usually seedlings at this stage are between 2 and 4 inches tall. You want the plants to be large enough to handle the increased distance from the grow light, but don't wait too long or your seedlings may become root-bound or lack nutrition.