

# Starting Seeds Indoors and Out



## BROOKLYN BOTANIC GARDEN Community Greening

### Planting Seeds Indoors

- Start with a clean egg carton with holes poked in the bottom.
- Use a sterile potting soil mix. You can buy this mix in a bag from a garden center or hardware store. Moisten the potting mix in a bowl or bucket until it feels as damp as a wrung-out sponge. Fill each cell with mix and pack down lightly.
- Read the directions on the seed package! The package will tell you how deep to plant the seeds, how long they will take to sprout (“days to germination”), how big the plants will grow, and how long it will take until the plants are mature.
- Sprinkle one to three seeds in each cell of the egg carton.
- Place the egg carton on a watertight tray or plate, and pour water into the tray. This is called bottom watering, and it prevents the seeds from being unearthed by the force of water poured on top. The amount of water used will vary depending on the size of your tray, but use enough to keep the soil evenly moist, not soaked.

### Caring for Seedlings Indoors

- If two or three seeds sprout in the same cell of the egg carton, snip out the weakest-looking seedlings, leaving only one seedling per cell.
- Continue bottom watering regularly.
- When plants develop two or three pairs of leaves (four to six leaves), it’s time to transplant the seedlings into larger containers. Make sure the container has drainage holes, fill it with moistened potting soil, and pack the soil down lightly. Using a spoon, scoop out the entire ball of soil in the egg carton hole. Make a hole in the center of the new container and bury the seedling in it, making sure to keep the level of the soil the same. If you have an egg carton that held a dozen eggs, you will end up with 12 seedlings in 12 pots.
- If you need to touch the seedlings, handle them by the leaves, or *very gently* by the stem.

- When all danger of frost has passed (in NYC, generally around May 15), plant your seedlings outdoors in the ground or in a window box. Water, weed, and mulch around your plants, and wait for beautiful results!

### Planting Seeds Outdoors

- With a shovel or trowel, loosen your garden soil to at least six to ten inches deep. Avoid walking on the area you've dug—the idea is to keep the soil light and airy, not packed down.
- Work in compost or other organic material—chopped or decomposing leaves, coir (also called coco peat), peat moss, etc.—to the soil.
- Read the seed packet directions carefully to determine how deep to plant seeds (usually between  $\frac{1}{16}$ - and  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch deep ) and how far apart to space them.
- Using a stick or your finger, create holes at the proper spacing and depth. Plant one large seed or a small pinch of small seeds in each hole. Use your hands to cover the seeds with soil, patting gently to firm the soil.
- Use a plant label or popsicle stick to mark where you've planted. Write the plant variety and the date planted on the label.
- Water gently after planting. Keep the soil evenly moist (but not soggy) until the seeds sprout. Use a sprayer with a fine nozzle so water droplets don't dislodge the seeds.
- In about a week the seeds will start to sprout. If there are seedlings growing too close to each other, snip out the weakest to leave just one (this may seem wasteful, but space is crucial for plants to grow properly).
- Mulch, weed, water, and stake as needed. Harvest times will vary depending on the type of plant.

*Updated 6/14/12*