How to grow from seed

Alleyn Park GARDEN CENTRE

Most seeds are easy to germinate if they have the right combination of water, air, light/dark and warmth.

Use good quality seeds, clean equipment and specialised seed compost. Always read the notes on the seed pack to understand what's needed, but here are some general points.

Sowing Indoors

To sow seed indoors, use a propagator, heated if necessary, or a seed tray with a cover. Use seed compost, which is low in nutrients and a fine consistency. You may find it easier to sow directly into modules, especially for plants which don't like having their roots disturbed. Use a tamper to level the compost in the tray.

For plants with deep roots such as peas, sweet peas and beans, use deep root trainers for sowing.

Always label trays and pots of seedlings – get the labels ready before you start, especially if sowing more than one type, to avoid muddling them up! Water fine seeds from below, in a filled gravel tray, or from above using a fine rose watering can.

When seedlings have their second pair of leaves, prick them out into new trays or new pots. This is lifting them carefully to avoid damaging the roots, and also discarding those seedlings that look weak or misshapen.

As they grow on and develop into stronger plants, replant them into larger pots filled with potting compost.

Harden off indoor raised seedlings before planting outside, to prepare them for lower temperatures and air movement. This is done either in a cold frame, or by moving them outside during the day and back in at night.

Sowing outdoors
A lot of seeds can be sown directly outside in March and April: just check the packs. As a general rule, rake the patch of ground and remove large stones and weeds. Then follow the instructions to scatter the seeds in a broadcast fashion, or space them out thinly in rows. Cover and water as directed.

Some herbs and vegetables can be grown in succession, to prolong the harvesting season. Spinach, salad crops, coriander can be sown several times, 2 or 3 weeks apart. Leave enough space to do this.