

Growing From Seed the Easier Way

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My first attempt at growing plants from seeds failed. And my second. And my third. And likely others that I do not care to remember.

I toyed with the notion that the seeds did not like me and, so, stymied my best-laid plans. That was a comfortable, face-saving explanation that I savored for some time. But, eventually, the scientist in me refused to accept such a fancy and demanded that I examine the problem more rationally.

In every instance, I realized, one of four catastrophes had occurred: (a) the seed starting medium had morphed into a desert or (b) been saturated with mold, or (c) the seedlings, once they broke cover, had become pale and leggy from insufficient light or withered from low humidity or under watering.

Thus, I was forced to conclude that I, and only I, was to blame for their failure to thrive. So, for many years, I gave up trying to nurse such delicate dependents and, instead, paid my local nursery to serve as a professional nanny.

But the charm of seeds—these cheap, compact packages wherein a few cells would reproduce and differentiate into a wide variety of magnificent plants—still entranced me. So, last year, I decided try again but I resolved to ignore the voices that told me to extend my growing season by starting seeds indoors.

I selected seeds that could be readily started outdoors and I dropped them there, at the right time of the year, in the carefully sifted and compost-rich soil of garden beds with hospitable neighbors and the right amounts of light. I recruited my husband to help check, and perhaps water, them every day.

And, voila! My seeds did what nature had programmed them to do. My seed dreams were fulfilled and our labors well rewarded! So, when the plants died back, I stripped them of their seeds, which I sorted into bowls to dry, then sealed in plastic for the future.

Now I have seeds from my seeds and, this year, again, I will grow them for beauty, fragrance, food and habitat. I have plenty in store, even though I have given many away, so at the end of this summer I will leave the new ones on their stalks for songbirds to eat throughout the fall and winter. But I will harvest the seeds of new species and begin the cycle again.

I urge you, too, to go forth and find and nourish the seeds of your dreams! If you are a first time seed grower who does not have a greenhouse or a lighting- and humidity-controllable sprouting rack, you might want to limit yourself, as I do, to the ones that you can start outdoors. Just do what nature does and drop them in the dirt.

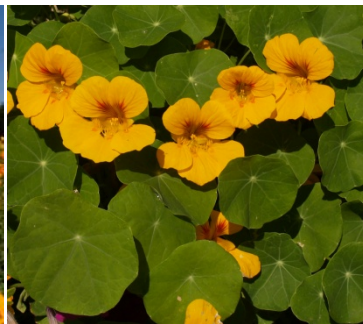
For the best yields, be sure to check the embryos and infants daily, watering them when the ground is dry to the touch. Once they have their second set of leaves, if you did not plant them in compost, provide a well-balanced, liquid fertilizer (5-10-5) every couple of weeks until their root systems develop. And keep an eye on the weather forecast so that you can cover them with plastic before a late freeze.

And, remember: if your seeds do not grow well outdoors, you can at least spread the blame around.

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Marigolds



Nasturtium



Bee on Nasturtium