

Tips for Success

Outsidepride has been in business for 20+ years, and for our entire time of operation, we've had a support helpdesk to answer questions and give suggestions. Here are some of the common questions that have come in and an answer for each. More tips for your success!

When I start seeds, what's considered to be good germination results?

The general rule is that you should not expect more than 65 – 80 percent of the seeds to germinate. From the seeds that germinated, expect 60 – 75 percent to produce vigorous seedlings.

Can I buy lots of seeds and store them from year to year?

It's best to only buy the seeds that you plan on using each year. But if plans change, seed can be kept for a year or more. The key to keeping seed is to ensure that the seed stays cool and dry. Laminated foil packages are the best for keeping seeds dry. If the seed is in a paper packet, place the packet in a tightly closed jar. A temperature of 40F is the best for keeping seed, so find a place in your refrigerator for a recycled, sealed mayonnaise jar with seed packets inside.

How long will seed last?

If the seed has been stored properly, most seeds will last 2 or 3 years. Flower seeds that have been coated with a clay coating to make them easier to work with will probably only be good for 1 year, so it's best to buy only what you plan on using.

Can I freeze my seeds?

Yes, but don't plan on freezing and thawing and then freezing again. Only thaw what you plan on planting. Again, the seeds will more than likely last 2 to 3 years.

What does "prepare the seed prior to planting" mean?

Seeds have the innate ability to know when it is the ideal time to germinate, and until that time they're dormant. In some seeds, it is difficult to break the dormancy, and there are various treatments that are used to break dormancy and stimulate germination.

Seed scarification: The seed coat is tough, and scarification involves breaking, scratching or softening the coat. Treatments include:

- filing the seed with sandpaper or metal file
- cracking the seed with a hammer
- pouring hot water (170 -212 F) over the seed and letting it cool
- soaking the seeds 12 – 24 hours before planting

Examples of seeds that do best with scarification are nasturtium, morning glory, lupines, and sweet peas.

Seed stratification: This is a treatment that provides an artificial chilling period of time for seeds that require a cold, dormant period before germination. A procedure to follow:

- moisten peat moss thoroughly

- squeeze out excess water
- mix the seeds with the moss
- place the material in a plastic bag and secure the top
- place the bag in the refrigerator (temperature range should be 35 - 45 F) for 4 to 8 weeks
- check the seed regularly to make sure it has not sprouted. If it has, handle carefully and place the seed/sprouts in pots.

Examples of seeds that respond well to a chilling period are Echinacea, Shasta Daisy, and Rudbeckia.

How do I provide darkness for the seed to germinate?

For seeds that germinate best in darkness, like Thunbergia, after planting and watering the seeds in well, instead of putting a clear dome lid or plastic wrap on top of the tray, but another tray on top. The trays are normally black, and setting one on top will create darkness for seeds that prefer that environment. Lift the tray daily to check moisture. Once there are seedlings, remove the top tray.

My seeds germinated, but my seedlings are wilting. What went wrong?

Seedlings whose leaves droop or shrivel, or whose stems, though not discolored, bend over along their entire length, are probably too dry, so soak the flat thoroughly.

If the seedling base turns brown and collapses though the leaves still look good, this may indicate a fungal disease called “damping off.” This disease can happen when the soil has been kept too moist and there hasn’t been ventilation. Once it starts, it’s difficult to eradicate. You can avoid it by not soaking the soil heavily with water, removing any dome lid or plastic covering the flat, and using an oscillating fan to move the air.

There’s mold growing on the surface of the soil. Will it hurt my seedlings?

Mold indicates that the soil is too wet. The seedlings more than likely will do ok, but withhold water for a couple of days and increase air movement by using an oscillating fan. You can also transplant the seedlings into fresh soil.

My seedlings are spindly. What can I do?

Seedlings that are tall and leggy have not received enough light. Reduce the amount of fertilizer you’re using, reduce the room temperature, and use grow lights if the seedlings are not getting enough light through a south facing window.

My seedlings are growing, but the leaves have some yellow. Am I over watering?

Yellow colored leaves is a sign that you need to give the seedlings some fertilizer – especially nitrogen. Use water soluble fertilizer diluted (about ¼ the full strength) each week, and gradually work up to full strength.

Where can I get more help if I have questions or problems?

A great place to go for accurate information is simply online. Search for your local extension office which will be under your county government listings. Extension offices are run and supported by university agricultural programs. Extension offices have volunteers and staff who can answer any type of gardening

question – like soil issues, pests control, crops and orchard management and more. They are a great resource of accurate information and there is no charge for their service.