

OL 301 Assignment Five Discussion

Online Learning: OL 305

Learn How to Grow a Family Vegetable Garden

Center for Sustainable Development:

<https://nonprofit.csd-i.org/learn-how-to-grow-a-family-vegetable-garden/>

How You Can Grow a Vegetable Garden: Fresh, nutritious vegetables for your family.

This week's resources:

OL 301 Assignment Five Homework Instructions

OL 301 Assignment Five Discussion



Discussion 5. Plant seeds & seedlings in your new containers. Be sure to plant some quick-to-harvest things too!

This Week's Goal: To plant 2 seed trays and 2 containers with seeds.

This week we're going to look at five different ways of planting vegetables in your urban container garden. The 1) first way is to purchase seed trays and a small bag of planting mix—like peat moss—and plant seeds into the seed tray. The 2) second way is to plant seeds—typically root crops—directly into the vegetable container thereby bypassing using a seed tray. The 3) third way, is that after six weeks or so you can remove the seedlings from the seed tray and plant them into the vegetable containers. The 4) fourth way is to sprinkle mesclun seeds on the container soil surface for quick salad greens. And, the 5) fifth way is to buy vegetable starts at your local garden center for planting into your garden containers.

PLANTING TECHNIQUE 1.


Planting Seeds into Seed Trays

	<p>By now you should have purchased a selection of seeds that you want to grow. I would separate out root crops such as carrots, beets, radishes and also mesclun, arugula, green onions and peas and beans.</p> <p>So now you should be left with herbs like cilantro and parsley and also chilies and sweet peppers, lettuce, bok choy and chard, squashes and zucchinis, tomatoes and kale for planting in the seed trays for future transplanting when they're big enough.</p> <p>Step One. Choose the seeds you want to plant today and make name tags. I use tags that look like tongue depressors/popsicle sticks and are sold in craft stores and grocery stores.</p>	
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Step Two. Purchase a small bag of peat moss. Home Depot sells a [3 cu. ft. bag of peat moss for \\$11.00](#). This is enough peat moss to fill 12 seed trays. This would keep you going for a year. Your local garden nursery probably has similar value deals and possibly even smaller bags.

Step Three. Buy two or three seed trays. Seed trays cost between \$3 and \$4 each. Here is an example at [Johnny's Selected Seeds](#). They are reusable for a number of years. They will also be available at your local garden nursery. Seed trays come in standard sizes ; the most popular size is approximately 12" x 20" with different numbers of cells. My favorite size is one that has 51 cells and is about 3 inches tall.

That Process Looks This:

	<p>Step Four. So I simply take something the size of a large yogurt container and dip it into the bag full of peat moss and pour that into the individual cells of the seed tray. I'll push the first pouring down little bit—not to compress it—but just to make sure that it's well distributed. I add some more on the top until the cells are full. Then I take a watering can with a fine spray and I moisten the peat moss, let it sit for 10 minutes to absorb the water and then wet it again.</p> <p>Step Five. On your seed packets it will tell you how deep to plant your seeds. The seed package might say one quarter of an inch. So I poke holes in the moist peat moss a quarter of an inch deep.</p> <p>I usually use one row of cells for each different vegetable variety.</p>
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Some Simple Bookkeeping Tips

Over the past few years I've developed some ultra-simple ways to keep track of what's going on in my garden.

For example, I like to keep track of when I planted seeds and how well they did.

I buy tongue depressors/popsicle sticks at a craft store or grocery store to use as name tags and I use a permanent marker like a Sharpie to put the:

- name the vegetable variety
- seed company
- planting date

I then write on the seed packet the purchase date and the planting date. Another small detail is that after I'm done planting seeds from a seed packet I seal it with a paperclip. Otherwise you wind up with seeds scattered around when you jostle the seed packets.

I also have two very small boxes that are just the size of a seed packet. So I can take 20 seed packets and stand them up inside of the boxes. I label one box with a Post-it that says "Planted" and the second box with a Post-it that says "To Plant." See the photo below on the right.

Having these simple organizational tools means that I can finish up planting things, put my seeds away, and 2/3 months later when it's time to plant again I can get started right away—I don't need to go looking for things or get organized: I already am.

After the seeds germinate I estimate the germination rate and write the percentage (for example: 75%) on both the name tag and the seed packet.

Seeds can last a couple of years. So this system helps me to evaluate if the germination rate for a package of seeds is dropping because of age. This way I can buy a new seed package at the appropriate time before the next planting.




Also, since I know which vegetables are from which seed companies I can evaluate how well they're doing. So perhaps a specific vegetable isn't doing very well in garden containers—I can look for an alternate variety—or even a variety bred specifically for containers.

Occasionally, I find that a specific vegetable seed isn't performing very well for me from a specific company—I can try a different company's seed for the same variety.

So I just place these name tags in the seed trays at the head of their row, and when I transplant them into the container I put the name tag in the container.

A couple of years ago, I went up on the roof and all of the name tags had been pulled out of my containers scattered around the roof by some rambunctious birds. So I completely lost track of which varieties were which varieties for that growing season.

So now I clip the name tags to the lip of the container with a bulldog clip (black spring clip). This seems to have worked.




		
<p>I place the name tags at the head of the row while I'm planting so I don't lose track. I will typically put two seeds in each hole to have a better chance at germination. I then cover the holes up with my fingertips. Now you can just water them everyday! I will make a note on the seed package of the date I planted.</p>	<p>Typically, after about 6 weeks the seedlings have germinated and are large enough to plant into the containers. After my seedlings germinate I will make a note on the seed package of the percent germination that I got.</p>	<p>Here you can see the seed packets in their small boxes with purchase date, planting date and germination rate. You can also see the paperclip to close the flap. These two little boxes sitting on a shelf keep me organized.</p>

PLANTING TECHNIQUE 2.

Planting seeds directly into the vegetable containers.

Some plants like root crops such as carrots, beets, radishes and also mesclun, arugula, green onions and peas and beans, get planted directly into the container. This saves the seed tray step.




Green onions are fun: space holes 6 inches apart with a fingertip and drop six seeds inside each one. This way you get bunches of green onions ready to grab and go.

		
<p>On the seed package it will give me a depth for the seeds. In the example above for carrots, I can fit three rows in the container. So I just use a thin straight edge to create a mini-trench. You could even use a flat bladed shovel.</p>	<p>Carrot seeds are so small that I just rub them between my fingers and let them fall into the slot. Beet seeds are large enough to handle and I try to space them an inch apart. They germinate close together so they will need to be thinned.</p>	<p>Mesclun is a mix of assorted small young salad greens that originated in Provence, France. You frequently find Mesclun served in salads in nice restaurants.</p>

PLANTING TECHNIQUE 3.

Planting plugs from the seed trays into the containers.

After four, or six or seven weeks your seedlings from the seed trays will be large enough to plant directly into the containers. The seed package will give you the spacing for the small plants. So you can place holes in the soil of your containers the appropriate depth and distance apart and just drop the plugs into the holes and gently press them into place.

		
<p>You can push up from the bottom of each cell and the "plugs" will pop out as a unit. The seed packet will tell you the plant spacing for the containers. I simply make small holes with my hand at the correct depth and spacing.</p>	<p>The newly planted plug/seedlings will look something like this in the container. If it's unusually hot and sunny, you might want to set the container in a slightly shaded area until the seedlings acclimate to their new situation.</p>	<p>Here you can see the name tag clipped to the container complete with the name of the vegetable, initials of the seed company, planting date and an estimate of percent germination.</p>

PLANTING TECHNIQUE 4.

Mesclun. Mesclun is a mix of assorted small young salad greens that originated in Provence, France. Mesclun comes in seed packets containing mixtures of different lettuce seeds (and other types of salad greens). So for example a seed company might mix red and green lettuce seeds, or different types of Asian greens into a single packet. You simply prepare your planting container, smooth off the soil, and from 12 inches in the air sprinkle seeds onto the top of the soil. I've learned to be a bit cautious so as not to put down too many lettuce seeds. You then simply sprinkle a 1/4" layer of soil on top of the seeds and sprinkle water to moisten the soil.

Soon dozens of lettuce plants will germinate and beginning in about a month or six weeks you can start picking individual leaves while they're still quite small—and make a salad from multicolored leaves that are in different shapes. It's fun and pretty. You often see salads like this in nice restaurants.

PLANTING TECHNIQUE 5.

Buying vegetable "starts" from your local garden nursery for planting in your containers.

Another approach, that can really speed things up, is to go to your local garden nursery and buy vegetable starts that are maybe already six or eight inches tall. These can include tomatoes, eggplants, peppers and cauliflower and broccoli. Most garden nurseries will usually have a large selection in different sizes at very reasonable prices. These vegetable starts mean that you can get planting today—and not have to wait six or seven weeks for your seeds to germinate and for the seedlings to grow.

In summary, here are several ideas:

1. You can separate your seeds into those which you will plant directly into a container, and those which you will plant in seed trays for germination.
2. Mesclun seeds can be scattered on the soil surface for quick salad greens.
3. Seedlings from the seed trays will be nice and strong for their transition into the containers in about six weeks.
4. Vegetable starts can be purchased from your local garden nursery for planting in your containers to give you a very quick start on the season.

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