

The Essentialist

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Don's Seed-starting Notes

(Intended as a supplement to MonaRae's notes and presentation)

Reasons for Seed Starting

- Long-season crops, e.g., tomatoes, peppers, eggplant
- Earlier harvest of other crops, e.g., cabbage, broccoli
- Multi-cropping (two harvests/yr), e.g., fall beets, bok choy, scallions, etc
- Reduced seed cost
 - Much cheaper than nursery plants
 - Increased germination rate
 - Reduced thinning losses
- Reduced insect damage
- Reduced weeding
- Optimized spacing
- Reduced need for soil prep.
- Increased varietal selection, cf. nursery starts
- Organic?
- Fun!

Reasons NOT to

- Requires a fair amount of time, work, space, investment, and commitment.

Some things I DON'T start in pots (a much shorter list than the things I DO.)

- Spinach
- Radishes, carrots, parsnips

Seed Care and Viability

- Store in cool, dry location
- Can last much longer than usually shown in references
- Test viability by wrapping a few seeds in a damp paper towel placed in a sandwich bag.

Seed selection

- Buy from Northern growers – Fedco, Johnny's Selected Seeds, etc
- Watch maturity dates.
- Open pollinated vs hybrid

Sowing

When to Sow

- See chart

Media

- Properties: good water retention, non-caking, fertile
- Commercial "Starting Mixes" are totally non-fertile
- The Sterility Argument.....
- Commercial starting mix plus home-made compost (50/50 blend) works very well.

Planting Depth

- 3-4 seed diameters, typical. A little too deep is better than too shallow.

Temperature

- Germination vs Growing vs Killing
- Soil vs Air

Germination

- Heat mats- the greatest thing since sliced bread. Allows quick, consistent starts. Especially important in a chilly house.
- Take off heat mats as soon as plants emerge.
- Germination rates

Where, When

The Heat vs Light Trade-off

Use of Cold Frames, Hoop Houses, Low Tunnels

- A hugely useful tool
- Plants can be started indoors, and then set out in flats,
- OR, you can germinate in the flats in the hoophouse,
- OR, you can sow in the hoophouse, then separate and transplant out.

Up-potting

- Mostly for peppers, tomatoes – (things that get big before setting out)
- If you have the space, just use big pots from the beginning.
- Root-bound plants won't thrive.

Hardening Off

- Hoophouses and cold frames DO NOT harden off plants adequately

Setting Out

- Why till?
- Transplant Shock- not an issue if you haven't disturbed the roots
- Depth
- Extra water
- Add compost (or fertilizer☺)

Multiple plants per pot.

Record keeping

- Keep a journal and/or use a spreadsheet similar to [Don's Planting Dates. Kalispell MT](#)

Photos



Onion starts under lights. Feb 22.



Tomato starts under lights. Mar 30.



Misc starts in Hoophouse- tomatoes, peppers, brassicas, etc. Apr. 21



Tomatoes in

Hoophouse. April 21.



Healthy

**Tomato, April 21. Short, stout, green. Plenty of light and fertility.
Started in pure compost. Up-potted from original 1"sq pots.**