

UCCE Master Gardeners of Lake Tahoe Newsletter

Garden Tips: Tennis Ball Container Seedling Starter

By: UCCE Master Gardener Dave Long

Tennis ball containers are a cheap and easy way to get your seedlings started.

Using a tennis ball container for starting seeds – A

1. Remove and discard the clear wrapping that is attached to the outside of the ball container.
2. Using scissors, a sharp knife, box cutter or hacksaw carefully cut the bottom 3 inches off an empty tennis ball container. Retain all pieces including the black lid from the container.
3. Puncture or drill 3-4 holes into the bottom section to allow drainage. Note that the plastic in the bottom section of the container is quite thick so be careful in puncturing the holes
4. Make 5 or 6 one inch cuts along the top edge of the bottom section so that the top portion can be reattached in a fashion.
5. Fill the bottom section with potting soil, add seed, and water thoroughly. Place the upper section with lid onto the seed cup portion. The upper section functions as a mini greenhouse
6. Place in area with adequate light for germination. Remove lid to re-water as necessary. Be careful not to let the seeds/seedlings get too hot. Remove the lid and/or the upper section to harden-off the seedling prior to planting or if temperatures become excessive.



Using a tennis ball container for starting seeds – B

When direct planting certain type seeds in the garden, a planter or raised bed, birds, squirrels, and chipmunks often find and dig them up. Examples of these type seeds include sunflower, corn and trellising beans or peas. A simple way to prevent seed loss on a small scale is to use the upper portion of the empty tennis ball can, with lid (see below) placed over the planted seed, that has been watered in. The container with lid acts as a mini greenhouse that speeds germination. Once sprouted, remove the lid and allow the plant to grow up through the container, which continues to help keep soil temperatures slightly higher and can be used to direct water the plant roots. This is also an effective way to fast track direct sown tomato seeds and similar warm weather plants.

