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Growing Vegetables from Seed  
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Growing and harvesting vegetables is easily one of the best reasons to have a home garden in El Dorado County. Because so many vegetables are grown as annuals, starting from seed is commonly done, not difficult, and offers many exciting varieties beyond what we find at local markets. So let's discuss starting vegetables from seed. There are six steps we should understand and a successful garden crop will be ours for the picking.

#1. Direct sow or start indoors? Direct sow is easy. We drop seeds in the soil, water, and wait for our crop to appear. Here in the foothills, some of the vegetables typically started directly in the soil are beets, carrots, cucumbers, corn, lettuce, radishes, snap beans, spinach, peas, turnips, and zucchini. If choosing direct sow, skip to the end. I will focus on starting indoors in steps #2-6.

Growing from transplants involves starting seeds indoors in a soil starting mix. When those seeds germinate and become seedlings, they're usually moved to a larger pot to grow sturdy while outdoor temperatures get warm enough and then eventually are planted outdoors. Starting indoors has two advantages - it protects plants from pests and diseases, and seeds can be started earlier.

#2. Buying seeds. If you are new to growing from seed then preplanning is essential. Be selective, and buy only what you think you can grow and that your family will eat. Consider your space. In small planting areas avoid the garden hogging plants such as squash, corn, or pumpkins.

#3. Preparation for planting. Have the proper materials on hand. Buy soil starting mixture, planting containers, heating mats or grow lights (if required) prior to actually starting the seeds. Read labels on seed packets to determine best conditions for seeds to germinate and if seeds need to be soaked in water prior to planting. Keep in mind that a warm and controlled environment is the best place to germinate vegetable seedlings.

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#4. Planting of seeds. Seeds should be planted at the depth stated on the packet. The best soil to plant seeds is a quality seed starting mix. Seed starter mix is lightweight, composed of fine particles and does not contain any fertilizer. Potting soil has a more coarse texture and may contain field soil, compost, or manure. It does not drain as well and is too rich in nutrients. Seedlings will not require fertilizer until transplanting. Seeds should be planted in grow trays or small grow pots which can be transplanted directly into the ground.

#5. Hardening off. Three factors that affect the success of transplanting seedlings are direct sunlight, temperature, and wind. Hardening off is the process of moving seedlings outdoors gradually for a portion of the day. Start by placing those seedlings outdoors for an hour the first day and then gradually increase the amount of exposure to at least five to six hours of sunlight a day prior to transplanting. This allows seedlings to become accustomed to strong sunlight, cool nights, and less frequent watering over a seven to ten day period.

#6. Transplanting seedlings is the final stage of the process of growing plants from seeds. Outdoor temperatures are important to know as some seedlings cannot tolerate a late frost. So check the frost dates in the area prior to transplanting any seedlings. Average daily minimum temperature is also important. For hardy plants such as broccoli, cauliflower, and cabbage - the average minimum temperature should be at 40 degrees. For tomatoes, peppers, and eggplant - the minimum temperature should be no less than 65 degrees.

Again read the packet for correct spacing between plants. Soil is also important when transplanting. For raised beds or planting beds a good garden soil with amendments is ideal. When transplanting into containers, potting soil is best. Using garden soil in containers is not recommended as it contains too many nutrients and could damage the roots of transplants.

**The “Propagation from Seed” scheduled for Saturday, March 2 at the Sherwood Demonstration Garden HAS BEEN CANCELED due to bad weather.**

UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling [\(530\) 621-5512](tel:5306215512). Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. Visit us at the Sherwood Demonstration Garden, located at 6699 Campus Drive in Placerville, behind Folsom Lake College – El Dorado Center. The garden is open on the second Saturday of each month, 9:00 a.m. to noon, till April 2019.

For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at [http://ucanr.edu/master\\_gardener\\_e-news](http://ucanr.edu/master_gardener_e-news). You can also find us on Facebook.