



## Get Seedy

By Kate Halvorson

UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County

Growing plants by seed is a centuries-old practice that still makes sense for today's gardener. Seeds aren't expensive and are an easy propagation method if you follow a few basic growing guidelines. Seeds also provide a greater variety of plants than buying nursery starts and seeds can be started indoors before your outdoor growing season begins.

Begin by selecting quality seeds from reliable sources, such as a local nursery, or by mail/online order from the many beautiful seed catalogs out this time of year. Heirloom or open-pollinated seeds have certain advantages, such as when they are saved and handed down from one gardener to another, the resulting plants have consistent quality, appearance, and, in the case of veggies, flavor. If you grow something you really like, save that plant's seeds for future gardens. They're not only a proven performer for your climate, but the seeds are free! Store collected seeds in sealed envelopes or small jars in a cool, dry place. Check these containers often for too much moisture, which appears as droplets on the inside cover, and vent the lids if necessary.

Get seeds off to a good start with a few basic supplies: just starting media and clean pots or seed cells. Seed-starting media isn't "dirt" or regular soil, which is too heavy, but instead, a light-weight mixture of finely textured, aerating materials such as peat or vermiculite. Seed starting media can be home-made (but be sure it is free of weeds and insects) or is available commercially. Loosely fill clean, small planting pots or cell packs about three-quarters full with thoroughly-dampened planting media. Previously used pots or cells can be re-used after they've been sterilized with a solution of nine parts water to one part bleach.

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Follow seed packet directions for sowing seeds. A general guideline is to plant the seed two to four times as deep as the diameter of the seed, being careful not to plant too deeply. It's a good idea to put two or three seeds into each planting hole, so that later, the strongest seedling can be selected and weaker seedlings can be pulled. Label pots with the name of the plant and the date you started the seeds.

Keep planted seed pots moist and in a warm spot until they germinate. Use a small spray bottle to lightly mist the pots to keep their growing environment humid. Seed trays can be used with small amounts of water underneath the pots, and then top-covered with clear plastic wrap, bags or covers to maintain moisture. Seeds require different conditions to germinate, but indirect sunlight, fluorescent light and low-temperature warming mats can help.

When seedlings emerge, remove covers and put them in a bright, well-aired spot such as a sunny south-facing window. Sit back and admire your "babies" for a few days. When the seedlings develop their true leaves, those leaves above the very first cotyledon leaves, it's time to transplant them from the small cells or pots to a larger growing container. Congratulations, you're well on the way to becoming a seedy gardener!

Join Master Gardeners Gail Fulbeck and Debbie Hillel to learn much more at their free Propagation from Seed class, Saturday, February 29<sup>th</sup> from 9 a.m. to noon at Sherwood Demonstration Garden, 6699 Campus Drive in Placerville (weather permitting). The presentation includes selection and germination of seeds, types of starting media, size of containers, and the process of growing out, hardening off, and transplanting seedlings. Participants will have an opportunity to plant seeds to take home. Seeds and containers are provided; bring clean gloves to participate.

For more information on the UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County, see our website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu> . Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512, or send us an email using the Ask a Master Gardener option on our website. Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. We also encourage you to visit us at the Sherwood Demonstration Garden, located at 6699 Campus Drive in Placerville, behind Folsom Lake College, El Dorado Center. See [http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/Demonstration\\_Garden](http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/Demonstration_Garden) for more information and days and hours of operation, or call us to schedule a tour. To sign up for notices and newsletters, see [http://ucanr.edu/master\\_gardener\\_e-news](http://ucanr.edu/master_gardener_e-news). Master Gardeners are also on Facebook and Instagram; we hope you enjoy our postings and will share them with your friends.