



Prepare your garden with Farmer Ken

Germinating seeds

Start your seeds in a germination kit from your local hardware, garden, big box or dollar store. The kit includes a tray with 48 to 72 individual cells and a clear plastic dome for increasing moisture.

What to look for in seeds and quality organic seed starting mix

Choose nice, fat heirloom quality or non-hybridized seeds, which will allow you to save the seeds from that plant for next year's garden. Choose a well-draining mixture of finely ground up bark, peat, small amounts of manure and perlite. You can find this at any garden center or big box store, or you can make your own.



Preparing the soil and planting your seeds

Use hot water to moisten the soil at least 24 hours prior to planting your seeds. Dump the bag of soil into a large bin. It will take approximately four to five gallons of hot water to moisten a 1.5 cubic foot bag of seed-starting mix. Mix thoroughly and let the mixture rest for 24 hours uncovered. Before you plant, you should be able to squeeze out droplets of water from the mix; if you can squeeze out a stream of water you will need to add more mix. Now you're ready to add your soil to the seedling cells. Fill each cell to the top with the mixture and firmly tamp down halfway, then fill to the top of the cell a second time and gently tamp down a quarter inch from the top.

Consult the seed planting directions on the packet to determine depth per individual seeds. The general rule of thumb is to plant the seed twice the depth of the diameter of the seed. If the packet says surface sow, gently push the seed into the dirt but don't cover it. Make sure the seed makes very good contact with the soil.

Heat and light

The area you use to start your seeds should be between 75 and 85 degrees for maximum germination rates. It should receive 14 to 15 hours of bright, sunny daylight, which means you may need a light bank of some kind to extend the hours of daylight. A southeast facing window will give you maximum exposure. If you need to create a light bank, you'll want LED full spectrum 2000 lumen bulbs. These bulbs only burn about 11-12 watts of actual energy.

Moisture

Use lukewarm water in a spray bottle to moisten the seed-starting mix daily under the dome until the seeds show signs of germination. Then, remove the dome and, from that point forward, water only from the bottom by pouring two inches of lukewarm water into the bottom tray, let it sit for 10-15 minutes and then drain off any excess. Don't water the individual cells. You may need to remove a few cells to pour the water in and drain the water out. Don't get the plant or dirt wet.

Eliminating slugs

The most common ways to reduce or eliminate slugs is to set out beer traps or pick them off by hand. You can also put your empty grapefruit halves open side down leaving room for the slugs to go inside. Placing broken eggshells, coffee grounds and dry sand around the base of your plants will keep slugs away while improving your soil at the same time. Companion planting is another way to control pests in your garden.