

Seed Starting Indoors and Outdoors



Are you getting the urge to get seed starting? The time for seed starting indoors and outdoors is fast approaching. When you are a true gardener you have been carefully perusing the seed catalogs for weeks. Finally, you have carefully made lists, money saved in the budget and you placed seed orders. The standby crops that your family loves were part of the plan and probably a few new herbs or vegetables made the cutoff, too. The equipment you need for seed starting was carefully stored away last summer, and is ready to be put into service again. The battle plan has been set. You are inspired and the plans are organized and detailed. You are a gardener and you will be ready to plant and harvest.

On the other hand there are people like me. People who do not consider themselves gardeners. I am in this category. I do receive seed catalogs in the mail and I take a few minutes to

browse and wonder. Then I put the catalog in the stack with other farm related catalogs of things I want to buy. And that is pretty much where it ends. You see, in my mind there is a difference between one who IS a gardener and someone who Has a garden. I am the latter. We have gardens. I even pay attention to others who ARE gardeners and learn some tips and tricks. But I am haphazard at best. I plant seeds whenever the spirit moves me. I do tend to pay attention to shade and sun patterns so that helps. Also, I have become quite good at my [container herb gardening](#) efforts.

And, finally, I come to my main point. Thank goodness for people like Amy Stross, author of the new book, [The Suburban Micro-Farm](#). The book is a complete volume of garden know how from someone who has little time and space to spend working on the gardens. Yet, Ms. Stross has come up with a way to grow lots of food, herbs and fruit trees on a small suburban yard.

In her new book, we learn how to approach gardening in an organized manner. How to approach the task of seed purchasing and get things ready for seed starting indoors. This was of particular interest to me while reading through the book.



Note: The book was previously published in 2016. Since then it has been re-published in a new format and with full color photographs, charts and illustrations. I have gained so much from this book that I was very willing to revise this post, update and re-publish.

Indoor Seed Starting

I have heard about starting seeds indoors. My son practices indoor seed starting on a regular basis. Seed starting indoors allows the seedlings to gain strength and grow without having to deal with the uncertainty of weather changes. Ms. Stross allows that other gardeners might have their own methods for indoor seed starting, but this method has worked well for her

purposes. She has even started enough seedlings to sell at a community garden sale using the method outlined in her book. The list of materials may be daunting but take a careful look. I bet you have many of the items already in your garage or garden shed.



Some of the items you might need to purchase or make:

Shelf or shelf system of some type. This could be a water resistant wood or wire shelving units that can be purchased. The important point is to use what works for your space, and budget.

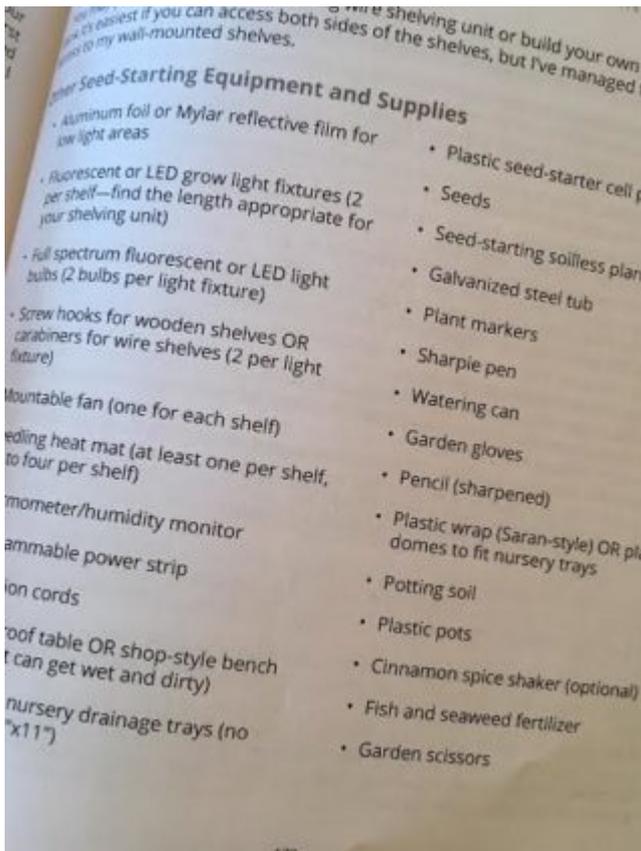
Lighting. Special grow lights can be found in many garden centers and home stores. Or you can use fluorescent lighting. These lights will be hung from the upper shelf or ceiling and must be hung securely, using screw hooks or wire and carabiners. You will need two per light fixture. So far I have narrowed my grow light decision down to this [one that has a stand](#), or this one that [hangs from the ceiling](#).

Heat mats – The [heat mats](#) are placed on the shelf and the seedling containers are placed on top of the heat mats.

Extension cords and a power strip. Getting one that has programmable features will help with the task of regulating the lighting times.

Nursery drainage trays, [seed starter containers](#), seeds, and other garden paraphernalia will round out your equipment.

Whenever possible, shop local and help keep your local garden center or nursery in business.



Should I Use Seed Starting Medium?

When planting the seeds and using a grow light system, Ms. Stross recommends using a special seed starting soil and mixing it up with the required water in a big batch. The excess can be stored after you let it dry out first.

Planting the Seeds

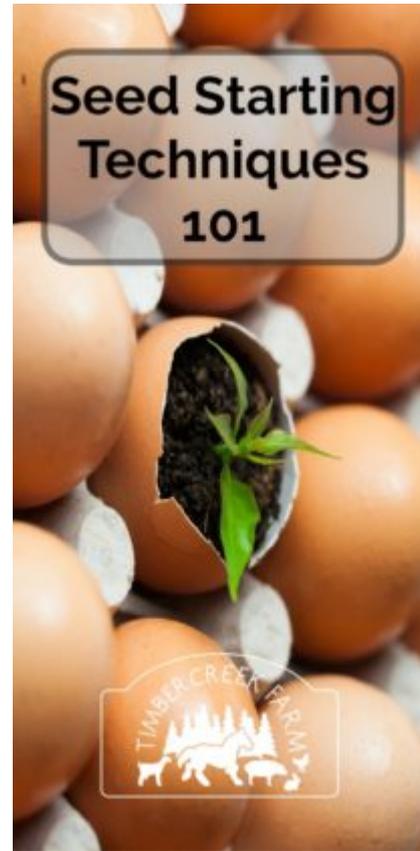
Did you know that seeds should be planted twice as deep as

their size? Using this guide, plant two seeds per cell in the seed starting cells, then cover lightly with the soil. For lettuce it is recommended that the seeds be lightly pressed into the top of the soil and not buried deeply. Make sure that you label the seed trays so you know what is growing!



Water the seeds. The method is outlined in the book in detail. Basically, you are watering the just planted seeds from the top to encourage them to contact the soil. After the seedlings are growing you are advised to use the drainage tray and water from the bottom by placing the water in the drainage tray. For whatever reason, this would never have occurred to me. I just always thought you watered from the top!

Next, cover the seed trays with plastic wrap or the clear cover that came with the trays, then set these trays on the heat mats. By the way, here's a little tip about [reusing seed trays](#) that you might want to know about.



After the seeds germinate, then remove the cover. Now it's time to switch on the lights and switch off the heat mats. There are a few differing methods described concerning the use of ambient light along with the grow lights. Basically, if there is natural light in the room, turn your lights on for the same duration plus a little more. Ms. Stross uses the lights for fifteen hours a day. If you have the programmable power strip, set it for your desired lighting time. The lights should be 10 inches above the seedlings.

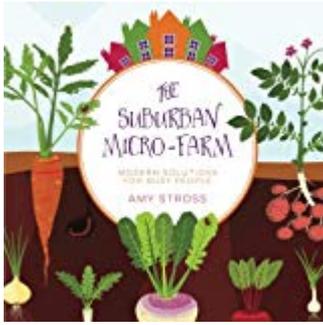
Seed Starting Outdoors

Many plants are well suited to direct sow seed starting. Leafy greens such as spinach and lettuce, squash and cucumbers usually do well started directly in the garden once the time is right. Beans, peas and root veggies like carrots and beets, radishes and potatoes also can be direct sown. In my experience weather often does harm to my small seedlings when I direct sow. I have had a great start, reduced to a disaster,

by heavy spring rains and intense heat waves. Perhaps if I let the seedlings grow indoors first, they will be stronger when transplanted and able to better withstand the punishment of weather. I am inclined to give this a try in my garden this year.



[*The Suburban Micro-Farm*](#) is a wonderful book on many levels. If you are more experienced in gardening you will appreciate the permaculture chapters, edible landscaping, and making money from your garden. Inspiration filled chapters, photographs, design ideas, planning tips, and do it yourself instructions make this the perfect garden reference book, too. I am giving it two brown thumbs up! [You can pre-order the new edition](#) now on Amazon. Or place it in your wish list!



To learn more about the book, [The Suburban Micro-Farm](#) visit Amy Stoss's website, [Tenth Acre Farm.com](#)

