

PLANT HERITAGE SEED SHOP

Sowing recommendations and cultivation categories

SEED SOWING

Introduction

The successful germination of seed is dependent on giving the seed the correct conditions to germinate. All seeds need to be sown in growing media which provides adequate oxygen and water. Most seeds have specific temperature requirements – either an ideal temperature range within which best germination occurs or a period of cold followed by a period of warmth. Some seeds have other specific requirements. Some examples are: *Allium* and *Knautia* require cold, moist stratification. *Coreopsis* and *Heuchera* require light. *Muscari* require pre soaking in cold water. *Cyclamen* requires moist and dark conditions. All seed is best sown as fresh as practical either as soon as possible after ripe, or if heat is required, in the spring following collection.

Growing media (compost) for seed sowing

- Need to have low nutrient levels and good drainage.
- Seed sowing mixtures are readily available 'off the shelf'.

It is also easy to make your own mixture: 50% general purpose compost, 25% propagating bark and 25% Vermiculite or Perlite. It is important to use fresh growing media, as the nutrients change over time. If you mix your own it is easier to avoid storing half used bags for too long. 'Peat Based' and 'Peat Free' composts are both suitable, but Plant Heritage recommends 'Peat Free' for environmental and conservation reasons.

Sowing

Fill pot, seed pan etc., lightly firm. Plan the depth of compost, so that after sowing and covering there is about 3mm between the surface and the top of the pot (enough to allow easy watering, but low levels of compost in the pot reduce can reduce light levels after germination and also encourage seedlings to rot). Sow seed thinly over the surface and cover to suitable depth - the final depth of compost over the seed depends on the size of the seed – a general rule is to cover the seed to a depth of twice its diameter.

Some seed needs light for good germination (e.g Papaver and Salvia), so sow on the surface.

Very small seed can be mixed with sand to help an even covering of well-spaced seeds.

Watering

Always sow in damp compost. After sowing, water carefully with a 'rose'. Fine seed and surface sown seed is best watered by standing the pot in water to prevent all the seed being washed to one side.

Aftercare

Place seed pots away from direct sunlight. For seed germinated in a glasshouse or window sill cover pots with (*see through*) propagator lid or similar to prevent the seed from drying out too quickly. Water occasionally if necessary. For seeds which need winter cold (stratification) to germinate cover the pot with a thin layer of grit after sowing, it is then easier to remove weeds, moss and liverwort, should they occur before germination.

Please note some seeds take more than one year to germinate (e.g peony) so it is best to keep seed pans for about three years before giving up.

General

When labelling the seed, put date of sowing on the label. Keep records of when you sow and the conditions (eg heat, light etc) and when the seed germinates. If you cannot find details of best germination conditions for a specific type of seed we recommend splitting the packet in two. Sow half as soon as possible after purchase and place seed pot outside in shade, leave over winter. Sow the other half in spring in gentle heat (15-20°C).

Obviously seed of tropical and subtropical plants will need heat.

Please note if the name of the plant is preceded by the word 'ex' it means that the seed has come from a cultivar, but is unlikely to be the same as the parent. Cultivars do not usually come 'true' from seed.

Growing plant from seed is an enjoyable and relatively inexpensive way to raise plants. Growing some of the rare seed on offer can assist with conservation – please always keep a record of what you have sown, and a label with each plant!

Further reading: *RHS Seeds by Jekka McVicar* (ISBN: 9781856268325)

Further information – RHS website: <https://www.rhs.org.uk/membership/PDFs/Seed-scheme/harvested-seed-germination-requirements.pdf>

Please note all seed is kindly donated to the Plant Heritage seed shop, and may have been open pollinated so it may not grow true to type. But we hope you enjoy the fun of growing the seed.