



Plant Seeds, Grow Flowers

Growing plants from seeds can be easy, economical and very rewarding. There is something quite magical about plunging a tiny seed into the soil and watching tiny leaves push their way into the sunlight; nurturing the seedling as it grows into a plant; and then delighting in the flowers it presents.

Many seeds grow quickly enough they can be planted directly in the garden. Choose the appropriate site for your seeds. Will your plants require full sun, part sun or shade, or full shade? Clear the space of all weeds and other debris. Loosen the soil to a depth of 6 inches and mix in lots of compost. Break up all clumps and rake the area smooth.

Plant seeds according to the directions on the seed packet. Some seeds need light to germinate. If they are planted too deeply, they won't grow. Others prefer the cover of darkness and need to be concealed in the soil.

Keep the soil moist, but not wet, until seedlings grow. Water with a fine spray so seeds won't be displaced. Thinning seedlings may be the most difficult task to carry out - it may feel like plant murder. But it is important to remove the smallest, thinnest sprouts until the remaining seedlings are at the recommended spacing.

Some seeds are easier than others, so it's a good idea to start with these to ensure success if you are a beginner. These seeds are also a great choice to plant with children.

Marigolds

If you grew any seeds as a child, you probably planted marigolds. Their happy flowers come in shades of yellow, orange or rusty red. There are small varieties barely reaching 6 inches tall; larger types can reach as tall as 3 feet.

Marigolds are not fussy about soil as long as it's not too wet. After the danger of frost is behind us, press seeds about ¼ inch into the soil. Space smaller types about an inch apart; taller varieties need more room ó plant them 8 to 10 inches apart.

Jolly Jester is a charming variety with brightly striped red and orange flowers. It grows 6 to 12 inches tall.

Nasturtiums

Nasturtiums are dazzling and delicious! Their leaves, stems and flowers have a peppery flavor ó perfect for spicing up summer salads. Both the bush and vine types boast charming round leaves.

Seeds of nasturtium need darkness to germinate so they must be pushed an inch into the soil. Space them 3 to 4 inches apart. Soak seeds in water overnight to soften the seed coat increasing the rate of germination.

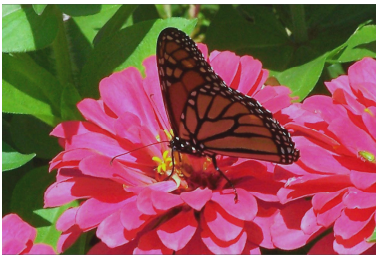
Alaska is a flashy variety with blooms of red, yellow and orange. Mounding plants grow 12 inches tall. If you prefer softer hues, try Moonlight. Gentle yellow flowers grow on climbing or trailing plants. Or choose Vanilla Berry for her custard-colored blossoms with strawberry-etched throats.

Sunflowers

Sunflowers are so much fun to grow with children. One of my favorite photos is one of my daughters, at 4 years old, standing beside and looking way up to the sunflower we had planted together.

Plant sunflower seeds ½ inch deep and 4 to 5 inches apart. They prefer good garden soil and lots of sunshine. Sunflowers need lots of room so you'll have to thin seedlings to 12 inches as they emerge.

Teddy Bear is a shorter variety ó up to 3 feet tall ó unlike other sunflowers. Children love their fully double, bright golden yellow flowers. Italian White grows 4 to 6 feet tall and boasts large, creamy white flowers with deep chocolate centers. Or go gigantic and plant Mammoth Russian sunflowers. They easily reach 10 feet tall topped with huge flowers with large brown centers surrounded by golden yellow petals.



Zinnias

There are lots of reasons to grow zinnias. They bloom in a rainbow of bold and brilliant colors. There are short types for the front of the border, tall varieties for the back, and sizes in between. Zinnias are lovely cut flowers and plants will provide plenty of blooms for arrangements. And birds and butterflies love them!

Plant zinnias ½ inch deep and 2 to 3 inches apart in well-drained soil amended with lots of compost. Thin seedlings of shorter varieties so they are 6 to 8 inches apart and taller types so they grow 12 to 18 inches apart.

State Fair grows to 3 feet tall with large 5-inch flowers in shades of yellow, orange, red, scarlet, purple and pink. Lilliput is a medium-height variety that produces smaller, but impressive blooms in a multitude of colors.

If you haven't planted seeds before, try some of these this year. Watch nature in action and marvel at the magic!



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