

Sowing seeds in modules

In SLI, most of the vegetables and herb seeds we buy are organic and heirloom seeds. All our members with a plot in our schemes and grow-at-home members get all seeds and seedlings free of charge. If you wish to buy your own seeds for some reason, please try to buy organic and heirloom seed and share it with other members to minimise waste. Seed production requires a lot of resources and a single packet of heirloom brassica seed is enough for all SLI members.

Types of seed

Most of the seeds we buy in packets - both organic or non-organic - are heirloom seeds which have been cultivated for generations and are open pollinated (not artificially pollinated). These seeds are important for maintaining bio-diversity.

F1 Hybrid seeds are produced by crossing two parents which have been inter-bred for a number of generations. This produces exceptional vigour and uniformity but the subsequent seed will not come to true type. These seeds are very expensive and are not good for maintaining bio-diversity.

Other expensive type of seeds:

Pelleted seed Seed covered in a protective 'shell' which disintegrates in the soil. This makes small seed easier to handle and sowing more accurate.

Seed tapes Seeds are incorporated at intervals along a dissolvable paper tape.

Chitted seed Pre germinated seed which is mail ordered and pricked out immediately, such as onion sets and potatoes.

Indoor sowing

Sowing seeds indoors in modules/cells has many advantages:

- Possible to make early sowings even when the outside temperature is not right
- Better germination rate as it is easy to look after plants indoors
- Save seeds - you only need a small quantity of seeds unlike direct sowing outside
- Minimum root disturbance when planting out which increases plant's chance of survival and reduces the risk of attack by pests and diseases

Indoor seed sowing can be done on a window sill, in a glasshouse or under a cloche. If you use your window sill to sow seeds, make sure you turn round the seed tray/pot regularly to avoid seedlings becoming leggy as they tend to grow towards the outdoor light.

Choose the right size modules (cell packs), pots and trays depending on the size of the seed.

Modules/cell packs are trays divided into individual cells and come in different sizes.

Brassicas (Brussels sprouts, kohlrabi, broccolis, kales, cabbages), French beans (dwarf), sweetcorn and peas can be sown in cell packs like the one here



Oriental salads – Mizuna, Mibuna, Mustard frills can be multisown in blocks (4 - 5 seeds in one cell) using the same cell pack above

Runner beans, French climbing beans, broad beans, courgettes, squashes and pumpkins can be sown in cell packs like the one here



Lettuces, basil and other small seeds can be sown in a seed tray (see picture on the right) with holes underneath; you can also use plastic trays that come with fruit and vegetable packaging by making a few small holes at the base for drainage.



Important – make sure all seed trays and cell packs are placed in a large tray with a capillary mat under them if possible.



Capillary mat

Choice of compost – Try to avoid peat-based compost which will help protect our environment. Most of the cheaper composts available in the market are not so good, so be prepared to pay a bit more for a good quality compost such as John Innes's compost. Alternatively, you can get compost made from garden waste by contacting <http://www.cjcleee.co.uk/green-waste-composting/> for delivery. Depending on the grade of the compost you get from them, you may need to sieve it for sowing small seeds.

How to sow seeds in modules/trays indoors

Cell Packs - Fill the cell pack with compost, level off, water thoroughly and wait until the compost is soaked. Make a hole using a dibber and insert the seed, gently cover the seed with compost. The size and depth of the hole should reflect the size of the seed; remember, the seed doubles in size when ready to germinate.

Seed trays - Fill the tray with fine compost, strike off level and water with a fine rose. Allow to soak and sparingly scatter seeds on top then gently sprinkle on more compost to just cover the seed.

Note – covering seed trays with a transparent plastic/glass cover when seeds are sown helps to retain moisture and improves germination rate. Removed the cover once the seed has germinated.

Labelling - Write on plastic or recycled wooden labels to note the date and name of the seed sown using a pencil.

Pricking Out - Once seeds have germinated and are becoming crowded, they must be individually transferred to a larger cell pack or pot to continue growing. Wait until the plant has at least *one true leaf*.

Water the seedlings and gently lift the plant from the seed-tray using a pencil or a dibber and plant it in a good-size pot/cell filled with compost; always hold the plant by the leaf so as not to damage the stem. Make a hole in the moist compost of the new container and firm the roots in ensuring no leaves are in contact with the soil; protect the seedlings from bright sunlight until they are re-established.

Hardening off - Seedlings germinated indoors need a period of acclimatisation to the outside world before they are planted out. This can be achieved in a cold frame or by placing the seedlings outside for an increasing amount of time each day. Seedlings should be fully hardy after 10 -14 days. Personally speaking I have never done this; as long as we don't plant seedlings grown inside until the outside temperature is right, hardening off is not necessary.