

Lesson 2 – Sowing and Growing

Advantages and Disadvantages of sowing direct

Advantages	Disadvantages
No root disturbance	Seedlings can get munched straight away, or dug up by pigeons!
Doesn't take up space in your house or greenhouse	Seeds may not germinate if soil is not warm enough
No need to buy/make potting compost	Late frosts can kill young seedlings
Good for fast growing seed – sow rows of radish or lettuce in between slower growing plants like leek, kale or root crops.	Late start means waiting later for first crops

Best to go for a combination of both. If planning to sow a row of beans, for instance, have a few backup plants sown in pots that are at a young plant stage, ready to go in the ground if seeds fail.

Caring for young seedlings

Seedlings need extra attention to get a good start.

1. Regular watering, not allowing them to dry out.
2. Feeding with nettle or comfrey or seaweed fertilizer
3. Protection from frost and pests

Potting on and transplanting

Potting on is for seedlings that are getting overcrowded and need more space to grow on, before eventually being put in the ground.

Water small seedlings and plug plants with a watering can fitted with a fine rose, to avoid damaging them. Larger seedlings and more mature plugs can be watered using a coarse rose, as flooding is necessary to soak the entire depth of compost and roots. A good trick is to turn the rose upside down, this decreases the force of the flow.

Feed pricked-out seedlings and plug plants with a fertilizer such as seaweed extract or comfrey juice, applied fortnightly in most cases. Larger plants may need weekly applications and tiny seedlings may only need monthly feeding.

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Transplanting is when a plant is big enough to go in the ground. It usually needs 'hardening off' first. Keep it for two weeks in a cold frame. Alternatively, lay out pots next to the house and cover with a sheet or fleece to protect from sudden cold snaps.