

Propagation and raising seedlings

with Rosina Buckman

For me, there is no greater fun in the garden than planting seeds and haunting the shade house every day to see if they have sprouted. The joy when they make their appearance makes me feel like a magician! Especially if those seeds have been saved from the previous season in my garden.

Why YOU should do this:

1. It's the start of any successful vegetable garden, when you can grow exactly the food you want to eat.
2. Beware, seed-raising can become addictive!
3. My handbag is often a receptacle of little tissue wrapped parcels...
4. It is creative and fun. Get the littlies involved. They love it!!!

What you will need and where you can get them & how to do it

1. Seeds. Buy, beg or grow them.
2. Seed-raising mix; half fine sieved potting mix & washed river sand.
3. Yogurt containers work well with holes made for drainage, used milk cartons, ditto drainage holes, small plastic pots.
4. Seeds come with their own nutrients for sprouting so leave the plant foods for the next stage when they are pricked out.
5. Three quarter fill your container with damp seed raising mix sprinkle on seeds and cover to desired depth, according to the size of the seed. (a good rule is seeds should be covered by double the thickness of the seed),
6. Gently water thoroughly.
7. Label, using an ice cream stick, (Being a serious seed- raiser I buy 500 at a time from the Cooroy drapery & Craft shop). Alternatively I have been known to cut up plastic milk bottles to make labels. You will also find a waterproof felt pen invaluable. Don't forget the date.
8. Most seeds should be up within 3 weeks. Don't be surprised if some only take a few days.
9. When the seedlings have developed a couple of leaves and are big enough to handle, prepare seedling punnets or little pots.

My recipe for stage 2 is:

- To half a bucket of best potting-mix add:
- A handful each of Mc Cleods soil- conditioner, Natramin and Gypsum.
- Mix this well and fill your containers with the mix. I then place the containers in a water bath for a few minutes, to thoroughly soak them.
- Using a fine bamboo skewer I lift out the previously dampened seedlings and separate them gently.
- Make a hole in the centre of each container with the skewer and holding the seedling ONLY by the leaves, transfer them one by one until your containers are full.
- Sprinkle them with a few pellets of Organic Xtra and water gently.
- Water daily and stand back!

When plants are strong enough plant them on to their final position MULCH...

Propagating and Seed Raising continued 1.

HARD Cuttings:

- To propagate hard cuttings, gently strip the outer skin from the joint you wish to put in the soil, with a sharp cutting tool. Remove leaves below soil level. 2/3 of the cutting should be under the soil. If there are any large leaves above soil level snip off about half to save transpiration. Dip the cutting in HONEY. I always have a jar of liquid honey on my potting table for this purpose.
- Next dibble a hole in the centre of your prepared container and push the cutting well into the hole and press the soil around it to make it stand firm. Water.
- Make a tent frame with fine wire and cover the whole pot with a plastic bag. You can use a rubber band or twine to secure the plastic around the pot.
- Cut a small hole in the plastic for air circulation.
- I usually stand the pot in a shallow saucer, so that when I water the shade-house they get watered too.
- LABEL with the name & the date
- I have had good results since I adopted this method.
- Have a go. Just remember to leave the cutting alone for a week or two.
- It's amazing what you can propagate when you try.

SOFT cuttings:

- Lots of leafy green herbs and vegetables grow easily and quickly from tip cuttings.
- Some will strike in water or in sand kept damp.

HINTS & PASSED-ON WISDOM

- Observation is the key here.
- Don't let your seedlings get too lanky, prick them out as soon as you can handle them.
- I plant leafy green seeds and things that grow above the ground from NEW MOON to FULL MOON.
- Seeds for root vegetables, radish, Daikon etc do best planted after FULL MOON.
- It is important to keep your propagating pots and punnets clean.
- SO, every now and again I give my collected used pots and punnets a good soak in a mild bleach solution after I have scrubbed the soil off them.