

FLORET FARM'S  
HOW TO START  
FLOWERS FROM SEED





# SEED-STARTING 101



There's nothing more rewarding than starting your own seeds. The benefits include getting a jump on the season, having access to hundreds of specialty varieties that you won't find at your local nurseries or garden center, and filling up your cutting garden fast in the most inexpensive way.

Before you get started, it's important to gather the proper supplies. You'll need seed trays, bottom flats that support the trays, seed-starting mix, plant tags, clear dome lids, and shop lights.

Listed on the following pages you'll find the supplies I used in the video.

### SEED-STARTING SUPPLIES

Johnny's Selected Seeds sells all of the supplies listed below. However, you can find similar items at your local hardware store or garden center. Many of these supplies can also be ordered online.

### SEED-STARTING MIX

There are so many options available when it comes to seed-starting mix, and brands vary by region. We use the Sunshine brand, but there are many suitable alternatives like this one that can be purchased online:

#### SUNSHINE ORGANIC #4 AGGREGATE PLUS

This fast-draining media is great for both pots and 72-cell trays.

### PLUG FLATS, TRAYS, LIDS & POTS

#### 72-CELL PLUG FLAT

The most widely used size here at Floret, great for just about everything.

#### LEAKPROOF TRAY

A standard 1020 tray without drainage holes used for bottom watering.

#### MESH TRAY

Used with pots and plug flats that need good drainage.

#### CLEAR ACRYLIC DOME LID

The 2-in (5 cm) size is used to cover seedlings while germination occurs and to keep humidity and heat in.

#### 3½-IN (9 CM) POTS

These basic square pots are great for anything that needs a little extra room such as sweet peas, ornamental squash, and vines.

#### SEED-STARTING KIT

Many retailers sell a kit that contains all three components: a 72-cell plug flat, a leakproof tray, and a clear acrylic dome lid. This kit even comes with a heat mat.

### OTHER SUPPLIES

#### WHITE PLASTIC TAGS

The flexible 5- by ⅝-in (12.5 cm x 1.5 cm) is our favorite for seed trays.

#### FINE VERMICULITE

Instead of covering seed trays with potting soil, we dust them with vermiculite. Unlike soil, it doesn't form a crust if it dries out, and it encourages faster germination.

#### HEAT MAT

These small heat mats plug directly into an electrical outlet and keep the soil at the proper temperature for germination.

### SHOP LIGHT SET-UP SUPPLIES

#### METAL SHELF

We use the 4-ft-wide (1 m) chrome metal shelves from Costco, but you can use anything you have on hand.

#### LIGHTS

The 4-ft-long (1 m) ballasts are inexpensive and easy to find. You can use either fluorescent lights or LEDs; both work great. Keep in mind that LEDs are stronger so shouldn't be placed as close to the plants as fluorescent bulbs.

#### CHAIN LINK

This can be purchased by the foot or meter at the hardware store and allows you to easily adjust the height of the shop lights.

### RESOURCES

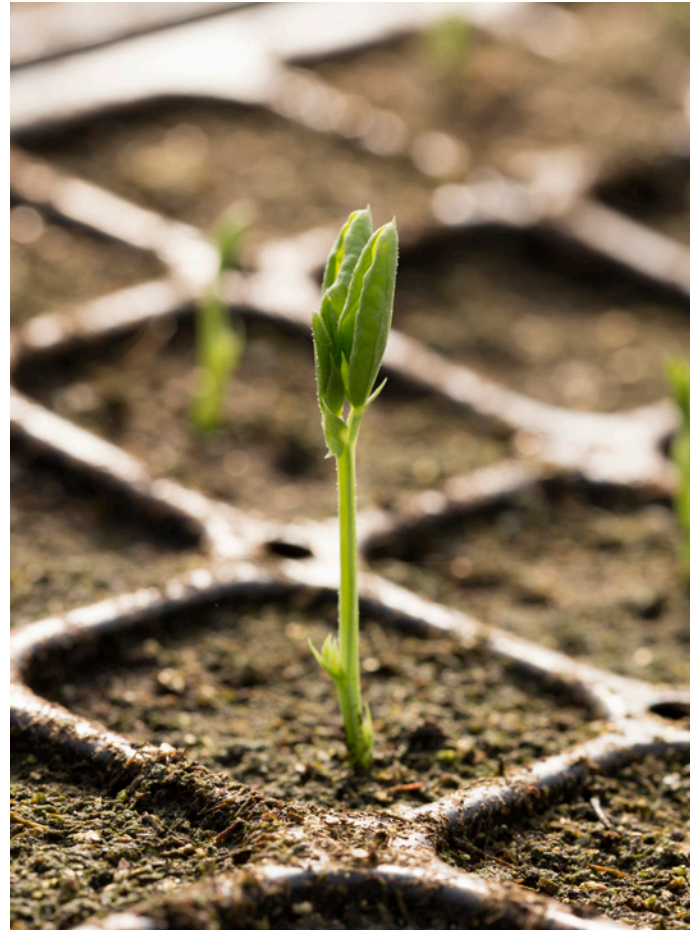
#### FLORET FARM'S CUT FLOWER GARDEN: GROW, HARVEST & ARRANGE STUNNING SEASONAL BLOOMS

Learn more about all of the flowers you can grow from seed in my first book, which features planting, cultivating, and harvesting information for more than 175 different varieties.

#### FLORET'S FAVORITE SPECIALTY SEED SOURCES

Be sure to check out our new resource for a list of specialty seed companies both here in the States and abroad.





## *SPECIAL CASES*

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### **COLD GERMINATORS**

Hardy annuals such as bachelor's buttons, bells of Ireland, bupleurum, larkspur, love-in-a-mist, orlaya, and Queen Anne's lace can be tricky to germinate indoors, so pop seeds into the freezer for 10 to 14 days before sowing; they will sprout readily. If planting directly outdoors, this step is not necessary, but it can help speed up germination.

### **BOTTOM WATERING**

Super-tiny seeds such as Iceland poppies, snapdragons, and foxglove are like dust and require special care to get started. We sow ours in small seed trays (288s) and barely cover the seed with a dusting of fine vermiculite. Bottom water (set your seed tray in a flat of standing water and let it wick up the moisture from below versus overhead watering) so as to not wash away the tiny seeds with a powerful overhead spray. Cover trays and place onto 70° F (21° C) heat mats until seedlings emerge.

### **LIGHT GERMINATORS**

There are a handful of varieties such as ageratum, columbine, flowering tobacco, and statice that require light to germinate. So when sowing, do not cover these seeds as it will inhibit sprouting.

### **MULTI-SEEDERS**

Some varieties benefit from sowing multiple seeds per cell. They don't need as much room to spread out on their own. These include annual baby's breath, bachelor's buttons, bupleurum, cress, dill, flax, grains, grasses, larkspur, love-in-a-mist, poppies, soapwort, stock, tickseed, and Queen Anne's lace.

# SEED-STARTING STEPS



**STEP 1** Moisten seed-starting mix until it is thoroughly damp but not dripping wet.



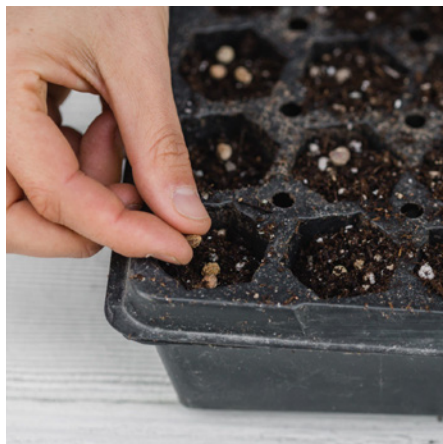
**STEP 2** Fill seed trays or pots to the top with soil, tapping them firmly against the table as you go so that the soil settles and there are no air pockets trapped in the cell trays.



**STEP 3** Label the tray or pot with the name of the variety you plan to sow and the date planted.



**STEP 4** Make a shallow hole in each cell using your finger, a pencil, or a chopstick. A general rule is to plant the seed twice as deep as its longest side.

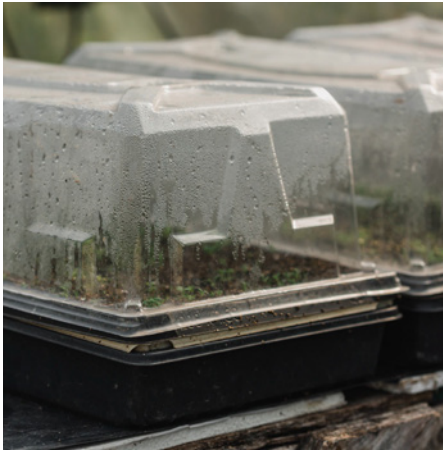


**STEP 5** Drop 1 or 2 seeds (unless it's a multi-seeded variety) into each hole until the tray is completely full.



**STEP 6** Cover newly sown seeds with a light dusting of fine vermiculite or seed-starting mix. Be careful to not bury the seeds too deeply.





**STEP 7** Cover the trays or pots with a clear acrylic dome lid and set on a 70° F (21° C) heat mat or in a warm corner of the house. Seeds usually sprout before you need to water again, but check the soil for moistness after 2 to 3 days and bottom water again if it's dry.



**STEP 8** When the soil starts to become dry, set freshly sown trays into a leakproof tray with ½ inch (1.2 cm) of water in the bottom and let the tray soak up the water from below.



**STEP 9** Check the trays or pots daily. Once 50-75% of the seeds have sprouted, remove the acrylic dome lids and move trays to a spot with bright light such as a greenhouse or under lights. Seedlings need 14 to 16 hours of light per day.



**STEP 10** Check seedlings daily and water when the soil appears dry, which could be every day or two.



**STEP 11** If seedlings begin to outgrow their trays before you're ready to plant them outside, replot them into larger containers. Or, if the weather is warm enough (after all danger of frost has passed), begin transitioning them outside.



**STEP 12** It's important to harden off young plants before putting them out into the garden; otherwise they will be shocked by the sudden change in temperature. To do this, set trays in a sheltered spot outside, increasing the amount of time they are out each day, starting with 2 to 3 hours, then increasing the time outside slowly over the course of a week or two, at which point seedlings can remain outside.