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Seed Starting with Mini Greenhouses

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Even though for the most part starting plants from seeds is fairly easy, sometimes the seeds need a little extra pampering to get them up and growing. For example, some seeds are tiny, others might have a long germination time, or maybe the seeds themselves might be older and in need of some extra TLC. My strategy for that is to use homemade mini greenhouses, as I like to call them. It's an easy way to increase your chances of success with problematical seeds. This technique works great for starting plants under indoor lights.

You can buy ready-made flats and containers that come with a plastic dome or lid, but I've had good luck making my own version. It's less expensive that way, and if you grow plants from seed you are likely to have all the necessary ingredients you need already on hand. And of course I'm always looking for DIY projects, especially when they save me money.

You can use any clean container you might have, just make sure it has drainage holes. Add your favorite seed starting soil (or soilless) mix, and fill the soil to within about an inch of the top. This leaves a little headroom for the plants after they come up. Then sow your seeds and cover to the proper depth, or leave on the surface of the soil if they need light to germinate. I often use a moistened toothpick to transfer the seeds to the soil, and it does a great job.

After sowing the seeds, give them a drink of water. To keep from dislodging the seeds, you can put the container in a pan of water and it will soak it up from the bottom. To finish, cover the container with some clear plastic wrap, secure it with a rubber band, and that's all there is to it. The plastic should be removed as soon as the seeds sprout. A cover should never be left on plants receiving direct sunlight after they have sprouted, or else the cover will act like an oven and cook the little plants. For seeds that need warm conditions to germinate, I put the containers on a heating mat that supplies bottom heat.

I typically use a 3-1/2 inch square plastic pot for this operation, since I usually have them on hand, and they are big enough for most of my needs. I always start petunia seeds this way, because the seeds are tiny, need light and warmth, and can take a couple of weeks to germinate. They're also pricey, and I don't want to waste a single one of them. Celery and parsley seeds are good candidates for this method too, and I use it for pepper and tomato seeds that need a little extra care.

Growing plants from seed doesn?t need to be expensive, and these little mini greenhouses can help you get seeds germinated without shelling out a lot of money. Happy Growing to all of you from Happy Acres!

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