

HOW TO START YOUR SEEDS & CARE FOR YOUR SEEDLINGS

Sow chile seeds 8-10 weeks before it is safe to plant in the garden. Avoid starting too early as plants may become root bound or leggy. Use shallow flats or containers filled with a sterilized soil mix or a high quality commercial seed starter mix. Optimum soil temperature for chile germination is between 80 and 90 degrees. You may need to supply bottom heat with the aid of a propagation mat. Plant seeds no more than ¼ inch deep. Chile seeds take between 14 & 30 days to germinate. Some varieties, like those in the *chinense* species, may even take up to 40 days to germinate.

Seeds themselves do not require light to germinate, however once the seeds have germinated provide adequate, good quality sunlight for seedlings. The light plants receive on a windowsill is often insufficient and may lead to leggy growth where plants are stretching for the sunlight. A bright south facing window that receives full sunlight all day is usually sufficient. This will result in a more compact, healthier transplant to set out in the garden. Do not overwater, especially when seeds are germinating, this may lead to damping-off, a fungal disease that causes young seedlings to die. Soil should be moist at planting time, but allowed to dry out somewhat on top before re-watering. Drain off water collected at the bottom of the planting tray so that seedlings do not sit in water. In order to reduce transplanting shock, seedlings should be gradually conditioned to the outdoors for about a week before being set into the garden. Start off with just an hour or two of exposure to the outdoors at first, then increase time slowly until you are leaving them outdoors day and night.