



Seed-Starting Mistakes Prevention Checklist

Timing

- I know my average last frost date.
- I counted back from last frost using the packet's "start indoors X weeks before" guidance.[g](#)
- I am not starting seeds so early they will be oversized and root-bound by planting time.

Soil and Containers

- I am using a sterile, fine seed-starting mix (not garden soil or old potting mix).[h](#)
- All containers have drainage holes.
- Reused containers were washed and sanitized before filling.

Planting Depth and Sowing

- I checked the packet for correct planting depth.
- When unsure, I planted most seeds about twice as deep as the seed is wide.
- Light-requiring seeds were pressed into the surface or barely covered.
- I sowed 1–2 seeds per cell/spot (not a big pinch).[b](#)

Light and Temperature

- Seedlings are under my brightest window plus (ideally) a grow light 2–4 inches above them.
- Lights are on 12–16 hours a day.[m](#)
- I moved trays off heat mats after germination and into slightly cooler conditions.

Watering and Airflow

- I'm keeping the mix evenly moist, not waterlogged.
- I mostly bottom-water or use a gentle spray so I don't disturb seeds/seedlings.
- A small fan or occasional open window provides light airflow around seedlings.[]

Disease (Damping-Off)

- I used clean mix and containers to reduce disease spores.
- I avoid letting trays sit soggy and cold.

Any collapsed, pinched-at-soil seedlings (damping-off) are removed promptly; affected soil won't be reused.

Thinning and Spacing

I thinned extra seedlings early by snipping at soil level, leaving the strongest one.

Crowded blocks of seedlings have been thinned to the recommended spacing.

Feeding

I am not fertilizing until seedlings have several true leaves.

When I do feed, I use a weak (about 1/4-strength) balanced fertilizer.

Hardening Off

I've planned 7–10 days to harden off seedlings before planting outside.

Day 1–2: a couple of hours in bright shade/light breeze, then back inside.

Each day, I gradually increase time and light exposure, saving full sun for the last days.

Learning for Next Season

I wrote down sowing dates, varieties, and any problems in a notebook.

I noted which changes (mix, light, timing, watering) seemed to help.

I've reminded myself that a rough tray or two is normal—and part of how gardeners learn.