

Seed Starting on a Budget Series: Avoid These 5 Mistakes



You're bound to mess up at some point or another in your gardening life. That's fine. I've made plenty of errors in the ten or so years that I've been a gardener. Much that I've learned is the result of messing up. I love that I'm able to experiment in my garden, and if I were afraid to bungle things, I'd be reluctant to try new techniques and methods.

That doesn't mean, though, that you should *always* make mistakes. With a little bit of knowledge in your pocket, there are some messes you can altogether avoid. Don't make these five mistakes.

5 Mistakes to Avoid When Starting Seeds

- **Overwatering:** I think watering is one of the most critical tasks that gardeners seem to screw up so often. We're terrible at hydrating ourselves, so it's not that surprising that we have trouble figuring out when and how much to water our plants. We forget that different plants have different needs, too. Seedlings require moisture but add too much water, and you'll encourage mold growth and potentially end up drowning your baby plants. Stick your finger in the soil to feel whether it's too dry.
- **Leaving seedlings in small containers:** Potting up seedlings is an annoying task, but waiting to transfer seedlings to larger containers may spell disaster. Leaving vigorous plants in pots that are too small will render them root bound. You'll stress your plants and stifle their growth. With the right timing, some plants don't need to be transplanted while they're still indoors. My lettuce seedlings, for instance, will be ready to go out before their too big for their original containers. Tomatoes, eggplants, and peppers, however, won't be happy relegated to mini pots once they've grown several inches tall.
- **Forgetting to harden off seedlings:** I think every gardener has made this mistake, and it's a costly one. You start your seedlings indoors, you do everything right, and then it's time to set them outside. You transplant your healthy starts on a gorgeous, sunny day and admire your hard work. The next morning, you head to your garden to check on your plants, and you find that nearly all of them have toppled over, dead or almost dead. What happened? Those plants weren't adequately hardened off. Plants need to adjust to the change in conditions before being thrown into the wild. *I'll be covering the process of hardening off in detail in the coming weeks, so check back for more info soon!*

- **Using too many seeds:** This is especially important for frugal gardeners. Stop tossing all your seeds into plant trays! There's no reason to waste an entire packet to start seedlings. All that's needed is for one single seed to sprout and flourish. Of course, not all seeds sprout, but using a whole packet is wasteful and unnecessary. Instead, plant two or three seeds per cell or pot. Using fewer seeds means you'll have leftovers for next season and thinning will be a much easier process.
- **Ignoring the forecast:** Don't become obsessed with your last frost date. It's just a guideline. And stop comparing your gardening progress to others. That gardener on Instagram who's just transplanted her tomatoes? They're in a completely different zone! Instead of waiting impatiently for the last frost date to come and go, keep a close eye on the weather forecast. Look carefully at the predicted highs and lows for the daytime and overnight. Becoming an expert in weather watching is an incredibly useful skill for the eager gardener. It's not enough to look outside and see whether it's sunny or raining. Knowing what's coming allows you to be prepared. If a sudden frost arrives after the last frost day, you can take measures to protect your tender transplants.

These aren't, by any means, the only mistakes you don't want to make as a gardener. But I think they're important and relatively easy to avoid.

I sincerely hope everyone is enjoying the warmer days as springtime advances. I've already planted a variety of greens and look forward to beginning the transplanting process for my cabbage starts.

Don't forget to leave a comment below to let me know what you'd like to see me write about. I'm happy to answer questions about anything! Even if it's something, I don't know

anything about. I always love to research and learn more about the plant world.

Happy Monday and happy gardening!