

## Windowsill Planting

Even if you don't have anywhere else, you can always grow plants in pots on a wide windowsill.

Pots or windowsill troughs of flowers and vegetables can stay on the windowsill year-round or be put outside in warm weather. Cucumbers, tomatoes and peppers will all grow well inside on a sunny south-facing windowsill. They will need to be in large pots (at least 30cm diameter) if they are to produce crops.

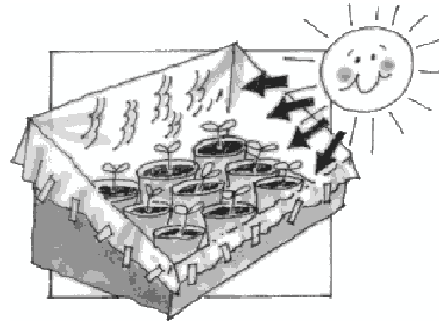
### Seed germination

Most seeds need warmth to germinate. Once they have germinated and the leaves are through the surface, they need light as well as warmth. This means that a sunny windowsill is ideal. However, the seedlings will be scorched in direct sunlight. If the window is south-facing, stick a piece of plain white paper onto the glass during the middle of the day to shade the seedlings.

You need to place the newly germinated seedlings as close to the glass as possible. If they are too far away they will start to grow and bend towards the light, becoming long and leggy. To prevent this you must reflect the light to the back of the seedlings.

This can be done very simply.

1. Take a cardboard box that will fit onto the window ledge.
2. Cut off the top.
3. Cut out the front to leave only 3-4cm of cardboard.
4. Draw a diagonal line from the top of the new front edge to the top corner at the back of the box. Cut along this line.



5. Line the base and sides with plastic.
6. Line the back with cooking foil, shiny side showing.
7. Place pots of seedlings inside, no more than three rows deep.
8. Place on windowsill.

Once the plants are strong enough they can be **hardened off** to go out into the garden or put into a windowsill planter to stay inside.

## Watering

The growing medium that the plants are in must be kept moist, but not too wet, at all times. Seedlings will die if their roots get too dry or too wet. It is better to water the seedlings from below, so place boxes on a waterproof tray. Water can then be poured into the tray rather than onto the seedlings. Plants can be watered with a watering can that has a fine rose, but only when not in full sun.

### Hardening off

This means getting the plants used to outside conditions. If the plants are to go outside then they need to be hardened off. To do this you need to put the plants outside during the day and then bring them inside at night. Do this for about a week.

After a week you can leave them outside at night, but cover them overnight with paper or plastic. Again you need to do this for about a week. The plants can then be planted out into the garden.

This is important for plants that originally come from warmer countries. Many of these plants are only half-hardy.

## Types of Plant

There are a number of different types of plant that you can grow.

**Half-hardy**— need to be germinated in warmth, and grown in warm conditions until the last frost has passed.

**Hardy** — seed will germinate and plants will grow outside. Some of them will grow better if started in pots or trays inside at first as this will protect them from the weather and animals.

**Annual** — grows from seed, flowers, produces new seed and dies all in one season.

**Perennial** — grows from seeds or cuttings and survives year after year.

**Biennial** — grows from seed in one year, overwinters, then flowers, produces seed and dies the next year.

## Pests Indoors

### Aphids

These creatures like the warm and still air found indoors. Outside, aphids get eaten by predators such as ladybirds and lacewings. However, these predators don't normally come inside. To help control aphids you need to grow plants that will encourage lacewings, hoverflies and ladybirds to come inside. Californian poppy and poached egg plant are good ones. You can also squash the aphids with your fingers.

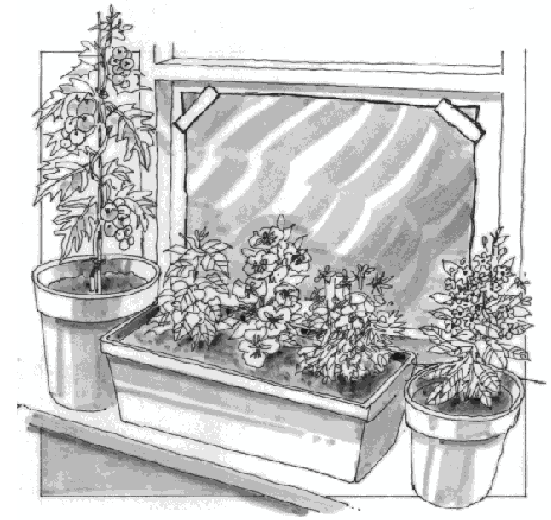
### Red Spider Mite

These are usually found underneath the leaves of plants. They feed by sucking the juices from the plant, and creating fine webs. The leaves begin to look yellow and mottled and if the pest is not controlled they will suck the leaves dry. Control by spraying with insecticidal soap or use the biological control *Phytoseiulus persimilis* the predator of Red Spider Mite. Mist plants often as this pest hates moisture

### Soft Scale and Mealy Bug

Soft scale looks like small brown lumps. Mealy bug looks like small lumps of fluffy cotton. Both these pests can be removed with tooth picks. Just scrape them off carefully without damaging the plant.

# Windowsill planting



A student's guide to  
growing plants on a  
windowsill.

## Windowsill Planting

Wide windowsills are perfect places to grow plants. It is easy for students to follow plant life cycles.

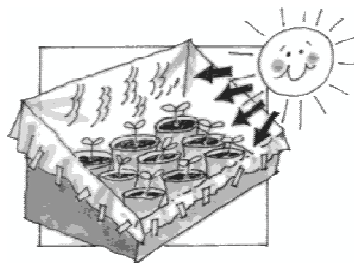
Pots or windowsill troughs of flowers and vegetables can be grown on the windowsill year round or be put outside in warm weather. Cucumbers, tomatoes and peppers will all grow well inside on a sunny south-facing windowsill. However, they will need to be in large pots (at least 30cm diameter) if they are to produce crops.

### Seed germination

Most seeds need warmth for germination. Once they have germinated and the leaves are through the surface, they need light as well as warmth. This means that a sunny windowsill is ideal. However, young seedlings can get scorched if they are in full sun. If the window is south facing stick a piece of plain white paper onto the window during the middle of the day. This will help to protect the young plants.

You need to place the seedlings as close to the glass as possible. If they are too far away once they start to grow, they'll bend towards the light, becoming long and leggy. To help prevent this happening you must reflect the light back towards the seedlings. Students can easily make a box for this purpose.

1. Take a cardboard box that will fit onto the window ledge.
2. Cut off the top.
3. Cut out the front to leave only 3-4cm cardboard.
4. Cut away most of the sides for about two-thirds of their length and then angle up to leave a high back.



5. Line the base and sides with plastic.
6. Line the back with cooking foil, shiny side showing.
7. Place plants inside no more than three rows deep.
8. Place on windowsill.

Once the plants are strong enough they can be hardened off for planting out into the garden, or transplanted into a windowsill planter to stay inside.

### Watering

The growing medium that the plants are in must be kept moist, but not too wet, at all times. Water the seedlings from below.

Place pots on a waterproof tray, and pour the water into the tray rather than directly onto the seedlings. Plants can be watered from above with a watering can that has a fine rose, but only when not in full sun. Remember seedlings will die if their roots get too dry or wet.

### Hardening off

If the plants are to go outside then they need to be **hardened off**. This means getting the plants used to outside conditions.

To do this, put the plants outside during the day, then bring them inside at night. Do this for about a week.

After a week you can leave them outside at night, but cover them overnight with paper or plastic sheeting. Again you need to do this for about a week. The plants are then ready to be planted out into the garden.

This process is for plants that originally come from warmer countries. Most of these plants are half-hardy.

## Types of Plant

There are a number of different types of plant that you can grow.

**Half-hardy**— need to be germinated in warmth and grown in warm conditions until the last frost has passed. This is usually the end of May or the beginning of June.

**Hardy**—seed will germinate and plants will grow outside. Some of them will grow better if started in pots or trays under cover as this will protect them from the weather and animals.

**Annual**— grows from seed, flowers, produces new seed and dies all in one season.

**Perennial**— grows from seeds or cuttings and will survive year after year.

**Biennial**—grows from seed in one year, overwinters, then flowers and produces seed, and dies the next year.

### Further Reading

Growing from seed  
—Garden Organic Guide

Growing Naturally  
—M. Brown, Southgate 1996

RHS Organic Gardening  
—P.Pears and S.Stickland,

## Indoor Pests

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### Red Spider Mite

These are usually found underneath the leaves of plants. They feed by sucking the juices from the plant, and creating fine webs. The leaves begin to look yellow and mottled. If the mites are not controlled they will suck the leaves dry. To control the pest you can spray with an insecticidal soap or buy the biological control *Phytoseiulus persimilis* the predator of Red Spider Mite. Mist plants often as this pest hates moisture.

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Soft scale looks like small brown lumps. Mealy bug looks like small lumps of fluffy cotton. Both these pests can be removed with tooth picks. Just scrape them off carefully without damaging the plant.

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