

Troubleshooter

My seeds didn't come up:

- Did you check for special requirements? Some seeds need a cold treatment, or soaking, or scarification, etc. Some need light, others must be in darkness.
- Were the seeds old? How were they stored? Old seeds may germinate poorly or not at all. Store seeds in a cool, dry place.
- Did they dry out at any time after planting? Germinating seeds need constant moisture.
- Did you drown them? Germinating seeds need air.
- Were they planted at the correct depth? Most seeds should be buried about 4 times their diameter.
- Was it too hot or too cold? Seeds planted in cold wet soil may rot rather than sprout. Some seeds (E.g., lettuce) refuse to germinate at warm summer soil temperatures.
- Did you wait long enough? Carrots and parsley take up to 3 weeks. Some shrubs and trees may take as long as 2 years!
- Did you (or a spouse) think they were weeds and pull them up? (Don't laugh—this happens!) Be sure anyone working in your garden can identify the seedlings.

My seeds came up but then the seedlings wilted and died:

- Was your equipment sterile? Did you use a special sterile seed-starting soilless mix? Damping off disease is a fungus that attacks new seedlings.
- Did they get enough water? Did they get too much? Roots need both air and water to grow.

My seedlings were tall and spindly:

- Did they get enough light? Leggy plants reaching for the light aren't good transplants. Try growing them under fluorescent lights instead of on the windowsill.
- Were they too warm? Plants that grow too fast get tall and leggy. The best temperature for most seedlings is in the 60s.
- Did they have sufficient fertilizer? While the seed contains all the food needed for germination, once true leaves develop, another source of nutrients is required.
- Gently brushing your hand over the seedlings 10 times or more a day slows growth and makes stockier transplants.
- Did you start the seeds too soon? It's better to plant smaller transplants than to hold them a long time on the windowsill.

My seedlings were healthy but wilted and died when I set them outside:

- Did you properly harden them off? Plants grown indoors need time to adapt to the rigors of our Colorado climate!
- Did a cutworm chew the base of the stems? Look for the culprit in the soil near the last stump in the row. Use skewers alongside the plants, or simple cardboard collars, to protect young seedlings.