



Growing Seed Plants Activity

Songbirds eat a variety of food, including seeds, nuts, berries, and insects. Many seed-bearing plants are easy to grow and have beautiful flowers for us humans to enjoy. Perennial flowers with seeds that birds eat include black eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia fulgida*), purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*), and largeflower tickseed (*Coreopsis grandiflora*). Annual flowers with seeds that birds eat include zinnia, sunflower, and cosmos.

These flowers can all be started from seed indoors or planted directly in the soil outside. Make sure that you read the directions on the seed package for the proper depth for planting the seeds. It's usually 2 or 3 times the size of the seed.

Because seedlings get planted outdoors in Pennsylvania near Mothers' Day, this can be a nice "Mother Earth" project for students to take home to their own mothers.

How to start flower seeds indoors.

Supply list:

- Biodegradable egg carton, newspaper pot, or other eco-friendly container
- Sterile seed-starting mix (do not use ordinary potting soil or garden soil – mixture must be sterile)
- Flower seeds
- Sunny windowsill or "cool" fluorescent light fixture

Directions:

1. Start project 4 to 8 weeks before date of last spring frost (Mothers' Day.)
2. Cut top off egg carton. (Carton can also be cut in half or thirds if sharing.)
3. Fill carton cells with sterile seed-starting mix. (Pre-moisten in pail when possible.)
4. Water thoroughly if not pre-moistened.
5. Poke hole in damp mix in center of each cell to desired depth, using finger, eraser end of pencil, handle of wooden spoon, or similar object.
6. Drop two or three seeds into each hole. (Not all seeds germinate.)
7. Refill hole with soil mix.
8. Place carton on sunny window sill or just a few inches under fluorescent lights.
9. Keep soil moist, but do not overwater.
10. Depending on variety, seeds will sprout anywhere from 2 days to 2 weeks. Annual flowers sprout sooner and are generally more rewarding for younger students.
11. For seedlings on windowsills: rotate carton 180° every day so seedlings grow straight upward. For seedlings under fluorescent lights, keep top of leaves always 1 to 2" beneath light bulbs. Ideally, seedlings will get 12-16 hours of light per day.
12. When seedlings are a 2 to 3 inches high, cut any extra seedlings done at soil line, leaving only one seedling per cell. Pulling extra seedlings may damage remaining roots.
13. After date of last frost (Mothers' Day), plant seedlings outdoors.
14. Let blossoms develop seeds (do not remove blossoms after flowering.)
15. Leave the seed heads on the plants so that the birds can eat the seeds. Sunflower seed heads can be removed and hung from fence, pole, etc. with twine.

