

Plant and Share Jargon Buster

This resource explains some of the common gardening terms that you often find on a packet of seeds or in growing instructions.

'drill': a groove or channel made in the soil to plant seeds in. The depth depends on the size of the seed. Small seeds like salads and carrots are usually sown 1cm deep. Larger seeds like runner beans 3cm deep.

'fine tilth': break large clods down with a fork and then rake to form an even fine surface ready for sowing.

'germination': the process by which a seed starts to grow, developing roots and shoots.

'harden off': the soft delicate leaves of young plants need to acclimatise to outdoor conditions before they are finally planted out. Gradually introduce young plants over a couple of weeks by placing in a cold frame, sheltered sunny spot and brought inside at night.

'mulching' or 'topdressing': when you spread a layer of nutrient-dense, organic matter, such as compost or manure, to your soil.

'potting on': moving a plant from a smaller container into a bigger one.

'pricking out': carefully moving a seedling from the tray in which it was sown, into a larger pot or tray to grow on before planting in its final position.

'propagate': to grow a new plant from a bigger, mature plant e.g. through cuttings or by splitting roots.

'row': seeds are sown in a drill to form a row or line of plants, to distinguish the seedlings from weed seedlings. It allows for correct spacings between plants and between rows so crops can grow well

'seedling': a tiny plant, usually with its first pair of true leaves.

'spacing': the distance between adjacent rows. This depends on the size of seed and plant it will grow into. Large seeds need greater spacing and small seeds, closer. If you plant seeds too close together they start to compete for nutrients and space and you get a smaller yield and possibly distorted plants!

'sow direct': to sow seeds into the soil, usually outside in beds or containers.

'sow thinly': small seeds are sown by sprinkling them thinly, so they are well spaced. Each seed is a potential plant so if they are too close together, they will become crowded and prone to disease competition for nutrients.



‘sow under glass/indoors/propagator’:

some seeds need to be sown indoors in pots or containers and given some heat to germinate and grow, usually 18 – 20°C. Once germinated the heat can be reduced but the seedlings need to be protected from harmful cool temperatures.

‘wide bottomed drill’: a channel about 10cm wide and flat bottomed. Peas are sown in these.

‘to sow’: to place and cover a seed in compost or soil.

‘successional sowing’: if you sow little and often (approx. every two weeks) you can extend your harvest over a longer period. So don’t plant the whole packet at once or you may find yourself with too much at one time. Good for carrots, French beans, peas, salads, spinach and rocket. You may also choose to have two batches of courgettes, cucumbers, runner beans and sweetcorn.

‘risk of frost has passed’: the time of year, usually in late May or early June, when night temperatures no longer drop to 0°C. Frost damage can kill young plants that are not hardened off or able to withstand low temperatures because they come from warm countries.

‘thin out seedlings’: carefully remove seedlings that are too close together by pulling them out until you have the correct spacing. Sometimes you can replant the seedlings you have pulled out.

‘to plant’: to dig or make a small hole and place a plant in that hole, pulling the soil back around it.

‘transplant’: usually planting a small plant from a pot into the garden.

‘true leaves’: when a plant first emerges from the soil it has a set of two leaves called cotyledons, also known as true leaves. These are actually part of the seed and act as a food source for the sprouting seed. As it grows, it forms two more leaves that look very different to the cotyledons and they now start to photosynthesise.

‘watering up’: placing a plant pot into 2–3 inches of water and leaving for 15 minutes to soak up the water.

‘well-prepared soil’: soil that has been dug over, weeds removed, compost added, raked and levelled to form a fine tilth.



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