

Shrubs and Trees - Seeds - 3) Planting Seeds

Introduction

This is final part of our three-part How to collect, store and plant woody tree and shrub seeds.

1) [Collecting Seeds](#) .

2) [Storing Seeds](#) .

3) [Planting Seeds](#) .

Planting Seeds In Spring

What do I need and how do I begin?

You are not growing annuals, herbaceous plants or vegetable seeds which will germinate very quickly in a week or two so a slightly different approach is needed.

Smaller seeds are best grown in plastic seed trays or, better still, more old fashioned wooden seed trays.



Old fashioned wooden
seed trays



or plastic seed trays



Old fashioned wooden
seed trays



Old fashioned wooden seed trays



Seeds in deeper pots



Seeds in deeper pots



Styrax seeds in pot

The best seed mixture for ericaceous (woody trees and shrubs) is finely sieved good quality TOPSOIL mixed with some sand or grit and peat if you prefer but say 60-70% pure (natural) topsoil. Some seed composts may well already contain grit.



Compost with grit



Compost with grit



Compost with grit

What is needed is plenty of warmth and daylight (ie the kitchen windowsill is not ideal) together with the moisture and humidity of the greenhouse.



Warmth and daylight needed

A solid base of slate or wood will help dissipate warmth up into the seed tray or box.



Solid base to dissipate heat



Solid base to dissipate heat



Covering trays with glass

More importantly still this will prevent mice or shrews digging up your seeds

The exact spacings between seeds of varying sizes and, more importantly, the depth to which they should be planted in the seed trays or pots requires common sense.

Basically tiny seeds should be sown on the surface and bigger seeds more deeply.

Various examples (with pictures) of how to plant different types of seeds are shown below.

One more thing before you start

If you have plenty of seeds of anyone variety take secateurs, a sharp knife or razor blade and cut one in half.

If it is green the seed is alive, has overwintered well, and should germinate properly.

If, even in the tiniest seed, there is no sign of life but rather a shrivelled void or perhaps a rotten 'mush' then you are wasting your time planting them as they are already unviable and dead.

Different techniques for sowing different types of seed.

Magnolias

Magnolia seeds had a thick orange outer coating when gathered. This outer coating which, by now, may well be brown and growing a hairy down needs to be removed or squeezed off between finger and thumb before sowing. If you do not do this germination will be poor or non-existent. In the wild this coating would be digested by the rodent or bird which ate the seed before it was secreted.



Cleaning magnolia seeds



Washing magnolia seeds



Washing magnolia seeds



Seed spacing



Seed hole & firm in



Seed hole & firm in



Seed hole & firm in



Seeds under glass

After germination remove the glass but cover the tray with mesh to keep the mice out. Mice love the smell of magnolia and relish the challenge. Slugs too are a threat and need to be deterred and squashed when seen.



Mesh to keep mice out



Mesh to keep mice out



Protect with newspaper



Seedlings in tray



Seedlings in tray



Seedlings in tray



Seedlings in tray



Seedlings in tray



Seedling large enough to pot on



Moving onto 2 / 3 litre pots



Moving onto 2 / 3 litre pots



Moving onto 2 / 3 litre pots

Here the problem and solutions are different.

The seeds are so numerous and tiny that a sneeze or a puff of wind can blow them away. They need to be sown on the surface of the seed tray and gently smoothed in rather than buried.



Tiny seeds easily blown away



Rhododendron sowing seeds



Rhododendron sowing seeds



Chopping moss



Moss covered seeds



Collect moss and add compost to tray



Cut up moss



Place moss over compost

Water in the seeds and moss with a hand held water sprayer. A watering can or any other method of watering in will mean the seeds all float to one end of the tray. Standing the seed box in a tray will allow self-watering from below but this must not be excessive or the seeds will rot in a waterlogged seed mix.



Hand water seed box



Moss with rhodo
seedlings



Shading in greenhouse



Rhododendron seedlings



Rhododendron seedlings



Rhododendron seedlings



Rhododendron seedlings



Rhododendron seedlings



Rhododendron seedlings



Rhododendron seedlings



Rhododendron seedlings



Rhododendron seedlings



Rhododendron seedlings



Rhododendron seedlings



Rhododendron lindleyi

These are easier to deal with although germination rates can vary hugely from year to year.

Camellias are top rooted plants (one central dominant root) and camellia seedlings are the same.

Plant three to five seeds only in a deep 2 or 3 litre pot with the same soil /compost mix as for all these woody plants.



Planting camellia seeds



Camellia Mary Williams

If the pots are large enough there is no need to prick out or transplant seedlings until the next spring when they should easily be big enough to pot on in March or April.

Other plants

All woody plants take different times to germinate.

Some rarities or difficult plants may only germinate in the second spring after planting. Davidias, rehderodendrons and oaks with larger acorns fall into this category. So just plant them in big pots (preferably clay), keep the mice out and forget about them for a year hoping for a big surprise.



Acer capillipes seedlings



Acer capillipes seedlings



Berberis hookeri seedlings



Cupressus tortulosa seedlings



Enkianthus 'Wallaby' seedling



Puya chilensis seedling



Rehderodendrons macrocarpum



Rehderodendrons seedlings



Rehderodendrons seedlings



Staphylea seedlings



Stewartia rostrata
seedlings



Styrax hookeri seedling

If you fail with a particular type of seed one year try again next autumn as rarer plants can be fickle and germination rates can vary hugely for individual plants from season to season.

Good Luck!

Luck can however be improved by following these instructions.

Please call the nursery or email us if you have any specific queries or problems growing particular plants. If we have tried them ourselves we may know the answers some of the time!

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