



Oregon State University
Extension Service
Master Gardener™

Growing in Oregon

Will Your Seeds Grow Plants?



Seeds that are viable are able to germinate (sprout) and grow plants. Stored well, most seeds should be viable for at least 1 year past the season for which they were packaged. Some seed types will last 3 or more years, but over time, seed germination rate (how many of the seeds will sprout) will decrease. You can test seed viability and germination rate using the steps below.

Supplies needed:

- 10 seeds from a packet of seeds you want to test
- 1 paper towel
- water
- 1 plastic closable bag (quart or gallon size work well)

Prep time: 5 minutes

Activity time: 5 to 10 days

Instructions:

1. If you know your seeds' number of days to germination, make a note of it, such as by labeling the plastic bag with that number of days. You may also want to write the date you start this activity, to help you count the days.
2. Fully wet a paper towel, ring it out and lay it flat.
3. Place 10 seeds an even distance apart on the damp paper towel along one edge.
4. Roll up the paper towel loosely, and place it in the plastic bag with care.
5. Close the bag to hold in the moisture.
6. Leave the bag in a warm spot (such as on top of a refrigerator).
7. Check the bag every couple of days to make sure the towel is still moist. If the bag is sealed, the moisture should remain. If the towel does not seem moist, open the bag and lightly mist it.



Step 3

8. After 5 to 10 days, check the paper towel to see which seeds have germinated. When a seed has germinated, you will see the seedling begin to grow out of the seed.
9. If it is time to plant, you can gently remove a sprout from the towel, holding the non-root side. Plant it in soil root side down. If the sprout is stuck to the towel, cut most of the towel away. It is okay to leave some towel on the sprout when you plant it. Learn more here: <https://foodhero.org/seed-starting>.



Step 5

How to use the results and what they mean:

The number of seeds that germinated will give you a fairly good idea of how that seed batch will do in the garden.

- If all 10 seeds germinated, plant the seeds as if they were brand new.
- If 7 to 9 seeds germinated, then most of the seeds will likely do well in the garden. Still, you should put extra seeds in each hole of your garden soil to increase the chance that something will grow. For instance, try 5 seeds per hole. You can thin the sprouts later to just one per plant if more than one grow.
- If 6 or fewer seeds germinated, you might want to try newer seeds, or try the full batch as microgreen seeds. Read more about microgreens here: <https://foodhero.org/microgreens>.
- If none of the seeds germinated, that batch of seeds is probably not viable and will not grow plants.

Visit www.FoodHero.org for more garden seed tips

This material was funded by USDA's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). SNAP provides nutrition assistance to people with low income. SNAP can help you buy nutritious foods for a better diet. To find out more, contact Oregon SafeNet at 211. USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

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