WHY START FROM SEEDS?
Growing from seed is the most economical way to start your garden ... much less expensive than purchasing starts! It’s not too hard, and these tips can help you have success! If you are comfortable growing from seeds, it’s just a short step to saving your own seeds from year to year. This means your garden plants will become better suited to your own location -- healthier and more resilient with each season.

TEMPERATURE
Some seeds (like orach and fava beans) need cool temperatures to germinate ... others (like chiles and tomatoes) need warm temps, above 75 degrees. If your seed packet tells you to wait till danger of frost has passed, you can assume those seeds need warm temps to germinate and be healthy. Many gardeners start seeds indoors in flats to get a head start on the outdoor growing season.

SCARIFICATION
Not as scary as it sounds! Some seeds have heavy or hard seed coats that make it difficult for water to get in and cause the seed embryo to sprout. In these cases, you need to scratch or chip the seed coat to allow an access point for the water. We use sandpaper or nail clippers or cutting pliers. Seeds that benefit from this treatment include okra, gourds, wild tepary beans, some hard shelled sunflowers, and devil’s claw. Your seed packet should tell you if it is necessary.

PLANTING DEPTH
If you plant seeds too deep, they may not be able to sprout and make it to the surface. As a general rule, seeds should be planted as deep as they are wide. Most seed packets will give a suggested planting depth.

PLANTING SURFACE
Mixing in well-aged compost before you plant will keep clay soils from developing a crusty surface that keeps seeds from emerging (plus it feeds your plants!) If you plant small seeds, make a smooth surface without big chunks of soil that tiny seeds can get buried under. Try to rake smooth and even. Pat soil down after planting to ensure good soil-to-seed contact.

MOISTURE
Seeds need consistent moisture to germinate, but too much water can cause them to rot (especially in cool soil) or even to be washed away. Gently sprinkle your seed bed daily until seeds emerge. In high heat situations you may need to water twice a day. A very light layer of mulch can help hold moisture in the soil ... but too much can keep the seeds from sprouting, so go easy. Large seeds like beans may benefit from an overnight soak before planting. This helps them soak up moisture and they will sprout faster once planted.

STARTING INDOORS
In some cases, starting seeds indoors in a controlled environment can improve germination by providing ideal conditions and removing the threat of predatory birds or insects. You will need to have a well-lit area, as seedlings will quickly become leggy and weak if there is not enough light. Also, be careful not to keep the soil too wet, as this can cause a problem called damping off, where the stems rot and break.

Do note that some crop types like beans and corn and many root vegetables do not transplant well, so it’s better to plant them directly where you want them to grow.