Home-Grounds-Garden

INDOOR PLANTS
Growth from Seed

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Page: 601.00
Date: 5-1981

Growing Houseplants from Seeds

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Asparagus fern, umbrella tree, and philodendrons are some of the many common, exotic, or unusual houseplants that can be grown from seeds. For some, this method of propagation offers a new experience, watching favorite houseplants germinate from seed and grow into mature plants. For others, it offers a challenge since some kinds of seeds require special attention.

Houseplants grown from seed are adapted to indoor conditions, especially lower light levels, from the start. Thus better growth and a greater chance of survival are ensured than are for many purchased plants.

In addition to catalogs of indoor plant seeds, most general seed and gardening catalogs contain some seeds of houseplants. Often seeds are sold by weight. To know how many seeds to order, check table 1 on houseplant seed weights. Many of these tropical seeds perish rapidly when stored. Only the amount of seeds that will be sown should be ordered.

The peat-lite mixes, which are the media often recommended for germinating seeds, are the best media for starting most houseplant seeds. Containers to hold the medium can be almost anything, from paper cups to plastic trays to clay pots. Any container should have a few holes in the bottom for drainage.

Once the seeds arrive they should be planted immediately. Some are short-lived or perishable and are often marked as such. Most perishable seeds are in either the Aralia or Arum families. A few palm seeds are also perishable, one being the parlor palm (*Chamaedorea elegans*).

In planting seeds of houseplants, fill the selected container with the desired sowing medium and then wet the medium. Seed treatments are usually not required, but will often improve germination of houseplant seeds. Table 2 on seed treatments lists the most common houseplant seeds available and recommended treatments.

Sow seeds to a depth of 2 times their width. Larger seeds can be sown in holes or furrows. Smaller seeds are best sown if sprinkled over the surface and allowed to settle into the medium. Place a label on the container with the name of the seeds planted and the sowing date.

After the seeds have been sown, water them with a watering can or clothes sprinkler having a "breaker." (The breaker helps avoid washing out the seeds.) A hose with a Foggit nozzle also can be used.

The germination medium should stay evenly moist at all times, not becoming too wet or drying out. Adequate moisture can be maintained by placement under a glass dome, pane, or plastic bag, until the seedling emerges from the soil. Keep out of direct light and, if mold begins to develop, remove the covering. Frequent misting will also keep the seeds moist at all times.

Since most foliage plants are from the tropics, their seeds usually need a warm medium to germinate—75°-85° F (23°-30°C). The temperature can be measured by a thermometer stuck in the medium. If needed, bottom heat can be provided by heating cables or a germination mat.

Most houseplant seeds have no light requirements for germination. Fig seeds (*Ficus*) do require light and should be sown on the surface of the medium. Once the seeds have germinated and emerged, they should be exposed to bright indirect light.

The slower growing plants

usually require more time for their seeds to germinate than do the faster growing ones. Most houseplants require 1 week to 1 month for germination. Others such as the bird of paradise and many palms require several months.

A houseplant seedling should be treated like any other seedling. Transplant it into a small container such as a 2 1/2-inch pot. As the roots crowd the pot, transplant it into increasingly larger containers. Use a recommended houseplant root medium and fertilizer. Your local county extension agent or garden center can give you advice on this stage of planting, as well as subsequent care.

Table 1. Houseplant seed weights

Common name	*Scientific name*	*Approx. no.* per ounce*	*gram*
Crab's eye	*Abrus precatorius*	280	10
Chenille plant	*Acalypha hispida*	120,000	4,200
Chinese evergreen	*Aglaonema commutatum*	180	6
Shell ginger	*Alpinia zerumbet*	1,400	50
Devil tree	*Alstonia scholaris*	11,000	400
Norfolk Island pine	*Araucaria heterophylla*	35	1
Alexandra palm	*Archontophoenix alexandrae*	65	2
Coralberry	*Ardisia crenata*	390	13
Foxtail asparagus	*Asparagus densiflorus* 'Meyers'	440	15
Sprenger asparagus	*Asparagus densiflorus* 'Sprengeri'	690	25
Asparagus fern	*Asparagus setaceus (plumosus)*	720	25
Dwarf asparagus fern	*Asparagus setaceus (plumosus)* 'Nana'	800	30
Ponytail palm	*Beaucarnea guatemalensis*	630	20
Ponytail	*Beaucarnea recurvata*	700	25
Australian umbrella tree	*Brassaia actinophylla*	4,600	160
Natal plum	*Carissa grandiflora*	2,400	85
Parlor palm	*Chamaedorea elegans*	370	15
Spider plant	*Chlorophytum comosum pictum*	14,000	500
Areca palm	*Chrysalidocarpus lutescens*	50	2
Balsam apple	*Clusia rosea*	3,300	120
Sea grape	*Coccoloba uvifera*	90	3
Arabian coffee	*Coffea arabica*	150	5
Dwarf Arabian coffee	*Coffea arabica* 'Nana'	140	5
Cabbage tree	*Cordyline australis*	7,400	250
Ti plant	*Cordyline terminalis*	2,800	100
False aralia	*Dizygotheca elegantissima*	8,800	320
Dragon tree	*Dracaena draco*	65	2
Thai dwarf dracaena	*Dracaena loureii*	420	15
Abyssinian banana	*Ensete ventricosum*	15	1
Silver-dollar tree	*Eucalyptus cinerea*	53,000	1,800
Japanese fatsia	*Fatsia japonica*	5,400	190
Chinese jello vine	*Ficus awkeotsang*	37,000	1,300
Weeping fig	*Ficus benjamina*	63,000	2,200
India rubber tree	*Ficus elastica*	84,000	2,900
Fiddle-leaf fig	*Ficus lyrata*	63,000	2,300
Indian laurel	*Ficus retusa*	610,000	21,000
Oval kumquat	*Fortunella margarita*	330	10
Silk oak	*Grevillea robusta*	3,100	110
Kaffir plum	*Harpephyllum caffrum*	25	1
Polka-dot plant	*Hypoestes phyllostachya (sanguinolenta)*	25,000	880

Table 1. Houseplant seed weights *(cont.)*

Common name	Scientific name	Approx. no.* per ounce	Approx. no.* per gram
Green ebony	*Jacaranda mimosifolia*	2,900	100
West Indian holly	*Leea coccinea*	830	30
Chinese fan palm	*Livistonia chinensis*	15	1
Velvet leaf	*Miconia calvescens*	350,000	13,000
Sensitive plant	*Mimosa pudica*	5,300	185
Edible banana	*Musa acuminata*	1,200	40
Banana	*Musa balbisiana*	440	15
Edible banana	*Musa x paradisiaca*	510	20
Chinese dwarf banana	*Musa* sp. Taiwan	760	25
Banana	*Musa velutina*	790	30
Emerald gem	*Nephthytis* 'Emerald Gem'	270	10
Bead plant	*Nertera granadensis*	43,000	1,500
Philodendron	*Philodendron bipinnatifidum*	26,000	900
Philodendron	*Philodendron imbe*	160,000	5,600
Frost resistant philodendron	*Philodendron lundii*	16,000	570
Selloum	*Philodendron selloum*	20,000	710
Bengal date palm	*Phoenix paludosa*	170	6
Chinese pygmy date palm	*Phoenix roebelenii lourelei*	260	9
Artillery plant	*Pilea microphylla*	1,000,000	37,000
Black-leaf panamiga	*Pilea repens*	910,000	23,000
Japanese pittosporum	*Pittosporum tobira*	1,000	35
Southern yew	*Podocarpus macrophyllus* 'Maki'	90	3
Ming aralia	*Polyscias fruticosa*	11,000	380
Purple guava	*Psidium littorale* var. *longipes*	1,200	40
Chinese serpent vine	*Psychotria serpens*	3,300	120
Macarthur palm	*Ptychosperma macarthurii*	180	6
Slender lady palm	*Rhapis humilis*	350	10
Oyster plant, Moses-in-the-cradle	*Rhoeo spathacea* (discolor)	5,300	190
Cuban royal palm	*Roystonea regia*	170	6
Dwarf schefflera	*Schefflera arboricola*	8,450	300
Umbrella tree	*Schefflera octophylla*	8,000	280
Nipplefruit	*Solanum mammosum*	3,200	110
Spathe flower	*Spathiphyllum* 'Mauna Loa'	800	30
Bird of paradise	*Strelitzia reginae*	140	5
Florida thatch palm	*Thrinax parviflora*	200	7
Willowmore cedar	*Widdringtonia schwarzii*	1,600	55

*These are only approximate since many species show considerable variation (e.g., *Brassaia actinophylla* ranges from 1,800 to 6,100 seeds per oz). Nevertheless, these values are useful in ordering seeds and to indicate relative seed size.

Table 2. Seed treatments

Common name	Scientific name	Germination %	Germination Days
Cold — Keep seeds at 43° F (5.5° C, as in the refrigerator) for 6 days before sowing.			
Coralberry	*Ardisia crenata*	95	79
Light — Sow seeds on surface of the medium.			
Weeping fig	*Ficus benjamina*	76	28
India rubber tree	*Ficus elastica*	96	29
Scarify — Rub seeds with emery cloth, sandpaper, or a nail file before sowing.			
Ponytail palm	*Beaucarnea guatemalensis*	16	33
Ponytail	*Beaucarnea recurvata*	55	58
Areca palm	*Chrysalidocarpus lutescens*	96	38
Fungicide — Soak seeds for 10 to 15 minutes before sowing in a fungicide solution used to control root rot and damping-off.			
Frost resistant philodendron	*Philodendron lundii*	93	27
Saddleleaf philodendron	*Philodendron selloum*	91	16
Bird of paradise	*Strelitzia reginae*	47	81
Hot water — Pour water (4 times the volume of the seeds) at 140° F (60.0°C) over the seeds and allow to soak for 12 hours before sowing.			
Foxtail asparagus	*Asparagus densiflorus* 'Myers'	81	49
Dwarf asparagus fern	*Asparagus setaceus* 'Nanus'	69	45
Australian umbrella tree	*Brassaia actinophylla*	82	40
Natal plum	*Carissa grandiflora*	44	29
Japanese fatsia	*Fatsia japonica*	33	26
Kaffir plum	*Harpephyllum caffrum*	57	43
West Indian holly	*Leea coccinea*	22	49
Emerald gem	*Nephthytis* 'Emerald Gem'	66	39
Chinese pygmy date palm	*Phoenix roebelenii lourelii*	15	76
Dwarf schefflera	*Schefflera arboricola*	97	39
Umbrella tree	*Schefflera octophylla*	27	38
No treatment needed			
Chinese evergreen	*Aglaonema commutatum*	89	140
Norfolk Island pine	*Araucaria heterophylla*	75	15
Sprenger asparagus	*Asparagus densiflorus* 'Sprengeri'	49	39
Asparagus fern	*Asparagus setaceus*	31	29
Areca palm	*Chrysalidocarpus lutescens*	82	60
Sea grape	*Coccoloba uvifera*	75	51
Dwarf Arabian coffee	*Coffea arabica* 'Nana'	38	41
Cabbage tree	*Cordyline australis*	71	54
Ti plant	*Cordyline terminalis*	93	68
Dragon tree	*Dracaena draco*	24	49
Silver-dollar tree	*Eucalyptus cinerea*	78	8
Silk oak	*Grevillea robusta*	13	8
Polka-dot plant	*Hypoestes phyllostachya (sanguinolenta)*	98	6
Green ebony	*Jacaranda mimosifolia*	91	20
Velvet leaf	*Miconia calvescens*	60	37
Banana	*Musa* species	18	57
Chinese pygmy date palm	*Phoenix roebelenii*	11	67
Artillery plant	*Pilea microphylla*	91	13
Southern yew	*Podocarpus macrophyllus* 'Maki'	82	58
Oyster plant, Moses-in-the-cradle	*Rhoeo spathacea (discolor)*	82	26
Willowmore cedar	*Widdringtonia schwartzii*	77	40

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