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Episode Description

Anyone can start growing plants and veg from scratch, whether you have acres of land or just a promising windowsill! Using the right sowing system, you can adorn your windows with seed trays or square pots to create a sprawling oasis.

Join Sarah Raven and Arthur Parkinson for this bonus episode of 'grow, cook, eat, arrange' to bring you up to speed on all things sowing. Sarah shares why she treats seeds like gold dust and how to keep them pristine for seasons to come, and Arthur divulges the secret to turning a windowsill into a bustling greenhouse of growth.

In this episode, discover...

- Encouraging your children to take part in sowing with you
- Growing from scratch, in the garden or on a windowsill
- Treating your seeds like gold dust and how to keep them fresh
- All the various sowing systems you can use
- Sarah's four Ts for super sowing
- Making your own homemade propagator

Links and references

Pre-order Sarah's new book: <http://bit.ly/3cR0kyh>

Pre-order Arthur's new book: <http://bit.ly/3qiBqUs>

Browse the Sarah Raven website: <http://bit.ly/3jvbaeu>

Get in touch: info@sarahraven.com

Products mentioned:

Shop seed trays: <http://bit.ly/3sNcq9>

Mini sowing kit: <http://bit.ly/3e06oF1>

Shop compost: <http://bit.ly/3q9UF9A>

Jiffy pellets: <http://bit.ly/3sMbwAG>

Cosmos collections: <http://bit.ly/3reGxwQ>

Broad bean collections: <http://bit.ly/3reU0Fc>

All sweet pea ranges: <https://bit.ly/3bYBAIB>

Capillary matting: <http://bit.ly/3843V8S>

Nigella collections: <http://bit.ly/3b5S0Jz>

Windowsill propagator kit: <http://bit.ly/3qeMXux>

Follow Sarah: <https://bit.ly/3iDTvBp>

Follow Arthur: <https://bit.ly/3jxSKK5>

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Direct sowing

Sow straight into the ground. This works best on freely drained soil and suits plants that don't like root disturbance and germinate quickly and easily once the soil is warm. This includes vegetables like radishes and lettuce, and ornamentals like poppies, grasses and dill. All our meadow seeds are also sown direct. For it to work well, you want the soil to be warm and moist, as it is in April and September, and have a fine tilth. Sow as thinly as you can and then thin the seedlings to the spacing recommended on the back of the packet. We don't thin our meadows, just leave the seedlings to get on with it cheek by jowl.

Sowing under cover

I sow lots of things under cover, particularly if planting in beds on heavy soil. Germination is quicker and more reliable in a protected environment. You can plant out at the correct distance, wasting almost no seed or time with thinning, and you can carry on sowing all year, whatever the weather. It's also better than bending over, or scrabbling along on your knees.

Seed trays

We do very little traditional sowing into small rectangular seed trays at Perch Hill, only using this method for tiny seed that is difficult to sow individually. Pricking out and potting on is too much of a palaver. If you prefer this method, see our sowing tables for varieties you can sow this way.

Guttering

I sow loads of things, particularly herbs and salads, into lengths of guttering. They germinate quickly and consistently, all cosy somewhere light and warm, and the whole lot can be transplanted outside in one go with ease. I sow most of my salad, peas and cut-and-come-again herbs (like chervil, coriander, parsley and basil) into the gutters. Most of these herbs and many of the salads crop well for 2-3 months, but they need replacing as soon as they start getting tired. Serial sowing every 8 weeks, with a new generation coming along somewhere else in the garden, is the ideal, but I often have a chock-a-block vegetable plot without a chink of room. Sowing my salads and herbs into pipes in the wings is an efficient way of growing salad to pick all year. The

plants from these can be slotted in, ready to pick as the garden lot come to an end. You can buy guttering from larger hardware stores.

Modules

We also use peat-free Jiffy trays (available from our website) for lots of our vegetables and flowers. These are ideally suited to tomatoes, aubergines, chillies, Florence fennel, lettuce, sweetcorn and celeriac – plants that hate having their roots disturbed, as well as any of the larger seeded flowers like cosmos and zinnias. Sow 2 seeds to each cell. If both germinate, remove one and avoid the task of pricking out. The large (45mm size) coir Jiffy pellets are the ones to use. With this large size you don't need to pot the seedlings on before putting them out in the garden. The plants are big enough to survive as they are. For this reason, I also use Jiffy trays for pricking out the few seeds we do sow into conventional seed trays. These take up a fraction of the space of tons of mini pots. Once the roots have filled the net, which usually takes 2-4 weeks, remove it to allow the roots to run free. This is important, as leaving the net on really holds them back. Then plant them out.

Individual pots

I do some sowing into small, individual pots for the plants with larger seeds. Amongst the veg: courgettes, squash, pumpkin, gourds and cucumbers, and amongst the flowers: cobaea and sunflowers, are all difficult to get into a Jiffy and their large seeds with a big surface area, rot easily in the compact pellet. Fill the pots with peat-free potting compost and water and push the seed in to the depth of your knuckle, vertically rather than flat. Biodegradable pots are ideal for this. When the seedling is at the right stage to be planted out, just pop the whole thing into the ground. These are ideal for plants that don't like root disturbance.

Root trainers

I also use root trainers (long, thin pots, available from our website), or cardboard loo rolls, for shrubby herb cuttings like rosemary, thyme and sage. They are also brilliant for sweet peas and beans (broad, French, borlotti and runner). All legumes, these included, will thrive with a long root run. When the seed first germinates, it puts down one long root. This breaks off when it emerges into the air at the bottom of the pot and, as with pinching out the tip, the root then throws out lots of side shoots. When these reach the edge of the root trainer, they slot into a channel in the side of each cell and are directed straight to the bottom. They then break off and you get a circle of root development, so the new root system forms very quickly. If you sow into

a short, stumpy pot, there is less initial root to branch. Longer root - more branches; quicker, bigger plant

Wooden or polystyrene crates

In the winter, I grow dill, coriander, parsley, chervil and basil in empty wooden wine cases, or in polystyrene fish boxes with holes in the bottom. Fill the crate with compost and, once a fortnight through the winter, sow a whole packet of seed. Cover them with cling film to enclose the moisture and put the boxes in the greenhouse or cold frame on a heated base. Your airing cupboard is fine but, grown in the dark, you'll need to check every 24 hours for signs of germination. Move the seedlings into the light as soon as there are any signs of green and remove the cling film. Allow the plants to reach about 3 inches and then start cutting. You should get two or three cuts from the same root stock.

My advice is to experiment with one or all of these sowing techniques and work out which one is best for you.