

Seed sowing glossary A-Z

Use this resource to help you and your audiences understand the gardening terminology on the back of seed packets or from books and other media sources. There's also a space to add more definitions on the next page.

'frost risk has passed'

When night-time temperatures no longer fall below 0C and so frost is no longer likely - usually late May to early June.

'germinate/germination'

The process of a seed starting to grow, developing a small root and seedling leaves.

'harden off'

The process of acclimatising young plants sown indoors to outside conditions before planting them out – this could be a sheltered sunny spot outside, or in a cold frame, but brought inside at night if frost is forecast.

'prick out'

The careful moving of a very young seedling from the pot it germinated in to a larger pot or module of its own, to grow on into a bigger plant.

'row'

Seeds are sown in a row to help distinguish the seedlings from weeds, and to give the correct amount of space for the crops to grow well.

'seed drill'

A channel or groove made into the soil, to sow the seeds along. The depth of the drill is determined by the size of the seed.

'seedling'

A tiny plant, usually only with its first leaves growing.

'spacing'

The distance between seeds along the drill and also distance between adjacent rows. This is determined by the size of the seed and size of the plant it will grow into.

'sow direct'

To sow seeds into the soil, usually outside in beds or large containers.

‘sow thinly’

Small seeds are sown by sprinkling the seeds sparingly, so that there is visible space between each seed.

‘sow under glass or in a propagator’

Some seeds must be sown indoors in pots and given some heat to start growing.

‘thin out seedlings’

To carefully remove seedlings that are growing too close together. Water the row of seedlings well and then simply pull out the excess seedlings, leaving a row of single healthy seedlings at the correct spacing from one another. Sometimes you can re-plant the thinned seedlings somewhere else.

‘transplant’

The planting of a small plant, usually from a pot into the final position in the garden, where it will grow on to flower or harvest.

‘well-prepared soil’

Soil that has been dug over, weeds removed, compost added, raked and levelled.

‘wide bottomed drill’

A channel that is wide as a hand (usually at least 10cms wide), and flat bottomed – not V shaped.
