

Help Sheets: Transplanting

What is transplanting?

Transplanting is moving a plant from one place or container to another. We use this word to describe taking a seedling from the soil it was grown in and putting it into another container or right into the garden. We also say we are transplanting when we move a larger plant from a container to the ground.

Transplanting Seedlings

Have a hole ready for the young seedling in a new container or in the garden before you start transplanting. The hole should be a little larger than the roots of the seedling.

The best way to transplant a seedling is to **gently scoop** the plant up from underneath the roots in the soil. This can be done with spoons, dibble sticks (large tongue depressors like the ones doctors use), or carefully with your fingers.

Always **support** the seedling from underneath the roots with your tool or your hand, and **hold** the seedling by the seed leaves. The seed leaves are the first set of leaves to grow on a seedling. It is okay to touch the seed leaves because they are going to fall off anyway as the plant grows. Do not squeeze the stem!



Handle the plants very gently, without pulling or forcing them out of the pot too roughly. Seedlings are very tender and if their tiny roots or stem are damaged, the plant may not survive.

Place the plant's ball of roots into the new hole. Most plants are transplanted so that the top of the soil comes to the same place on the plant's stem that it did in the pot. (Tomatoes are the exception: A tomato plant can have a lot of its stem planted underground since the stem will grow new roots and help the plant get a better start.)



Gently fill the hole with soil or potting mix. **Press** the soil gently around the roots. Make sure the plant is standing up straight, not leaning to the side.

Water thoroughly. If water washes away some of the soil covering the roots, **add**

more soil and a little more water.

Get the plant off to a good, nutritious start by **feeding** it a **starter solution** of liquid fertilizer. Make sure you follow the directions on the fertilizer bottle. It is important not to over fertilize young seedlings as this can harm or even kill them.

Transplanting Tips:

Carefully **remove** the cup or pot that holds the seedling before replanting. **Peat pots** or **peat pellets** are the only pots you can **plant with** the seedling.

If the plant roots are growing tightly around the inside of the pot, **loosen** them a little with your fingers before transplanting.

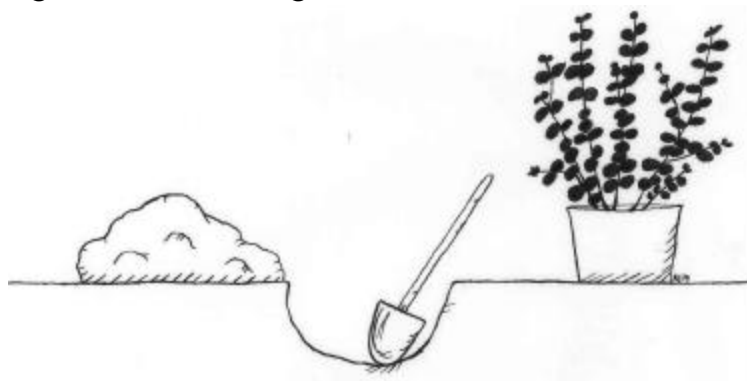
If you are putting your seedlings outside:

- Young plants should be **hardened-off** (see *Hardening-off on the next page*) before transplanting and **protected** from frost, drying, and direct sun until you see them start to grow.
- In warm weather, try to **transplant** young plants on a cloudy or drizzly day. If this is not possible, plant them in the late afternoon or evening. The seedlings will dry out too fast if the sun is shining brightly on them, so it is good to take advantage of the cooler temperatures of the evening.
- **Cover** outdoor garden transplants with baskets, buckets or other protection when it gets too cold, especially at night.
- **Mulch** around young plants. In a newly planted garden, straw, pine hay, or shredded newspaper works best. Mulches with large pieces such as pine bark are hard for young seedlings to grow through.



Transplanting Large Plants

1. **Dig** a planting hole a little larger than the root ball of the new plant.



2. **Remove** the plant from its pot. **Loosen** the roots carefully with your fingers.
3. Gently **put** the plant root ball (the ball of soil and roots) in the hole, and **add** soil. **Press** the soil firmly around the root ball so it stands up easily. Again, most plants are transplanted to the same soil level as the level in their starting pots.
4. **Water thoroughly.** If water washes away some of the soil covering the roots, **add** more soil and a little more water.
5. Get the plant off to a good, nutritious start by **feeding** it a **starter solution** of liquid fertilizer.
6. **Mulch** around the plants to help stop weeds from growing.

Hardening-off

Plants that have been growing inside are very tender and should get used to the weather outside slowly, just as you have to get used to cold water when you go swimming. To harden-off plants, put them outside for a few hours the first day, a few more hours the next, and so on until they can stay out all night. If the weather report calls for a frost warning, bring plants indoors. After about a week they should be ready to plant outside.

New Words

hardening-off: gradually getting young plants grown indoors used to being outdoors in cooler weather

mulch: covering the soil around a plant with leaves or bark chips

peat moss: plant matter from swampy areas that makes a good potting mix.

peat pellets: small pellets of peat moss that are easy to start seeds in.

peat pots: small pots made of compressed peat moss, good to start seeds in.

starter solution: low-strength fertilizer that provides nutrients needed by young plants

seed leaves: the first leaves to grow on a seedling; they contain nutrients needed for early life.

transplanting: moving a plant from its growing place and planting it in a new place in new soil