

Pricking Out Seedlings

Handle by the leaves – not the stem – and move with as much root as possible

Pricking out is the process of transplanting seedlings from a crowded seed tray into individual pots or modules, so they have more room to grow. Done carefully, it gives strong, healthy plants. Done badly, seedlings can be set back – or even lost. Follow these guidelines for success.

Key points

- Seedlings must be large enough to handle by their seed leaves (cotyledons), not the stem.
- Always move seedlings with as much root as possible.
- Disturb them as little as you can – they recover quickly from leaf damage, but stem damage can be fatal.

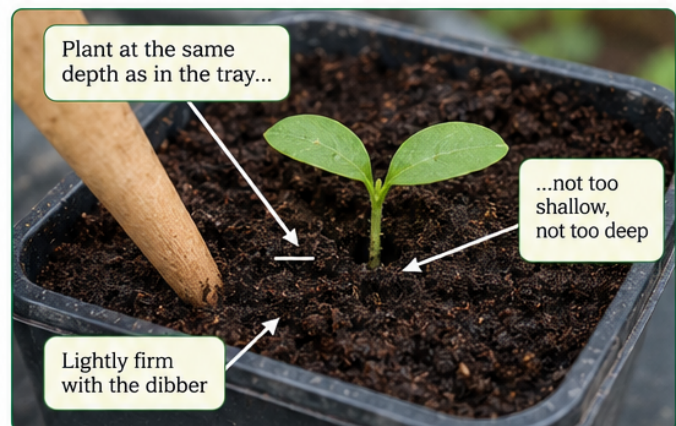
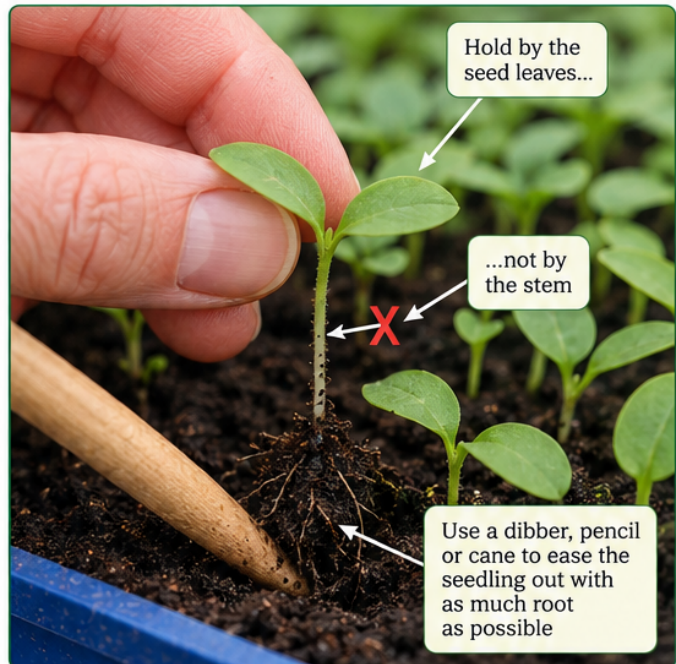
Why handle by the leaves?

If you hold a seedling by the stem and damage it, the plant is very unlikely to recover. If you hold it by the seed leaves and the leaves are bruised, the plant will usually recover and continue to grow.

So wait until seedlings are big enough to pick up gently by their seed leaves – don't try to prick out tiny seedlings.

Step-by-step guide

- 1 Water first** – Water the seed tray or compost and let it drain for a few hours. Moist (not soggy) compost makes seedlings easier to lift out with a dibber, pencil or cane, and helps you keep more of the roots.
- 2 Lift the seedling** – Hold the seedling gently by the seed leaves. Use a dibber, pencil or cane to ease it out of the compost, teasing underneath the roots to lift it with as much root as possible.
- 3 Make a hole** – Use the dibber to make a hole in the pot or module where the seedling will be planted.
- 4 Plant** – Place the seedling in the hole at the same depth it was growing in the tray – not too shallow, not too deep.
- 5 Firm in** – Lightly firm the compost around the seedling with the dibber.
- 6 Water well** – Water the seedlings in.



Aftercare

- Seedlings often lean over after watering – this is normal. Leave them for a few hours and they will usually pick themselves up.
- Resist the urge to keep checking them. Disturb them as little as possible.
- Use tap water that has been left to stand in the watering can for a couple of hours (in a greenhouse or indoors) so it warms up. This helps avoid shocking the seedlings.

Remember

- ✓ Handle by the seed leaves, not the stem.
- ✓ Move with as much root as possible.
- ✓ Plant at the same depth.
- ✓ Water well – then leave them to get on with it!

Prick out carefully – and you'll be rewarded with strong, healthy plants.

Pricking Out Seedlings

THE GENTLE WAY TO STRONG, HEALTHY PLANTS

Pricking out is the process of transplanting seedlings from a seed tray or crowded sowing container into individual pots or modules so they have room to grow.

KEY PRINCIPLES

- **Handle by the seed leaves, not the stem.** Seedlings are delicate. If you damage the stem, they may not recover. If you accidentally damage a seed leaf, they will almost always grow away.
- **Move as much root as possible.** The more roots you keep intact, the quicker and better the seedling will establish.
- **Keep disturbance to a minimum.** Check, plant, water – then leave them to settle and grow.

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

- 1 Wait until seedlings are ready**
 - Seedlings should be large enough to handle by their seed leaves (cotyledons) and have at least one pair of true leaves.
- 2 Prepare the compost**
 - Water the compost in the seed tray first and allow it to drain for a few hours. Moist (not soaking) compost holds together and makes it easier to lift seedlings with maximum root.
- 3 Lift the seedling**
 - Gently hold the seedling by its seed leaves.
 - Use a dibber, pencil or cane to loosen the compost around the seedling and lift it out, bringing as much root as possible.
- 4 Make a planting hole**
 - Use the dibber to make a hole in the pot or module compost. The hole should be deep enough so the seedling will sit at the same depth as it was in the tray – neither too shallow nor too deep.
- 5 Plant**
 - Place the seedling into the hole.
 - Lightly firm the compost around it with the dibber.
- 6 Water well**
 - Water thoroughly. Seedlings may lean over at first – this is normal.
 - Leave them undisturbed for a few hours. They should pick themselves up and continue growing happily.



WATERING TIP

If using tap water, let it stand in a watering can for a couple of hours in a greenhouse or indoors to warm up. This prevents shocking the seedlings with cold water.

1. HANDLE BY THE SEED LEAVES, NOT THE STEM



CORRECT

Hold the seedling by the seed leaves. If leaves are damaged, the plant will recover.



INCORRECT

Handling by the stem can cause damage. Damaged stems often will not recover.

2. THE PRICKING OUT PROCESS



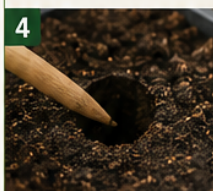
Water the compost and allow to drain for a few hours.



Gently loosen the compost around the seedling with a dibber.



Lift the seedling by the seed leaves with as much root as possible.



Make a hole in the new pot or module with the dibber.



Place the seedling in the hole at the same depth as before.



Lightly firm the compost around the seedling with the dibber.



Water well.



Seedlings may lean over after watering – this is normal.



Leave undisturbed for a few hours. They should pick up and grow away.



FINAL THOUGHT

Be gentle, take your time, and give seedlings the best start. Strong roots today mean strong, productive plants tomorrow.