

## How to sterilize potting soil for seedling production

To get seedlings off to a good start, you'll want to plant them in a clean, uncontaminated growing medium free of weed seeds, fungal spores, harmful pathogens, and other garden pests. Sterilizing your potting soil will help! Here are two ways to sterilize soil:

### *Solarize your potting soil*

You need:

- 2 sheets of clear plastic OR
  - clear plastic bags
1. Break up all soil clumps and remove any leaf litter from previous plants.
  2. Choose a spot that receives all-day sun. Lay down the bottom sheet of plastic. Spread the potting soil evenly over the top. Leave about a 15 cm (6 in) space away from the edges of the plastic. You can make a layer of soil about 30 cm (12 in) deep.
  3. Water the soil until it is just moist.
  4. Cover with the other sheet of plastic. Pull the plastic tightly across the soil surface, and tuck under the edges, securing with rocks or a layer of soil along the edges. If using plastic bags, fill them with damp soil and close tightly.
  5. Leave in the sun for 4 to 6 weeks during the hottest part of the year to sterilize the soil. Areas with cooler, windy, or cloudy climates need 8 to 10 weeks.

### *Steam your potting soil*

You need:

- a large old pot
  - a rack that fits in the bottom of the pot
  - heat-proof steaming containers (metal pans or cans, etc.)
  - foil
1. Set up your steamer: Set the old pot on your heat source. Put about 5 cm (2 in) water in the bottom of the pot. Place a rack in the bottom of the steamer (or you can use a few rocks).
  2. Set heat-proof containers on the rack above the water. Fill with no more than 10 cm (4 in) of soil in each container.
  3. Cover each container tightly with foil.
  4. Place a lid on the steamer, leaving it cracked slightly to prevent steam from building up.
  5. Bring the water to a boil. Once the water is boiling, allow it to boil gently for 30 minutes.
  6. Remove from the heat source. Allow the containers to cool in the steamer.
  7. Keep sterilized soil covered with the aluminum foil until it is time to use it.