



## **Troubleshooting Your Seed Starts**

The growth phase, just after germination, is when problems tend to arise. Keep a close eye on your plants, especially for these common issues:

### **Damping off**

This is caused by botrytis, a fungus that occurs if humidity exceeds 85%. The condition comes on suddenly, and is initially seen as seedling collapse. The stem withers and the seedlings topple over.

The problem isn't reversible but can be prevented by maintaining good air circulation, not over-watering, and ensuring your soil medium is sterile. If damping off occurs, remove the affected seedling as soon as possible, and maybe even remove some of the surrounding soil to ensure the fungus does not spread to nearby seedlings.

### **Leggy plants/spindly growth**

Look at the lighting situation. If it's been particularly cloudy or you live in a northern region, you may need to use supplemental lighting. If you have a grow light and are still experiencing problems, be sure the light is only a couple of inches above the seedlings.

High temperatures cause rapid growth and can also lead to leggy plants. Reduce the temperature by removing the heat mat or adding fans.

Larger, older plants can also become overcrowded when they are close together. Thin plants or move them into larger containers so that they are not competing for space and light.

### **Poor root growth**

Poor drainage is one cause of poor root growth and can be prevented by using containers with adequate drainage.

Too low temperatures and low fertility can also lead to poor root growth, as can compacted soil. When you are potting, make sure you don't pack the soil too tightly.

### **Mold on the soil surface**

Don't overwater. Only water plants when the soil is dry. Check your plants daily to assess their need for water.

Bottom watering can help prevent overwatering. Water plants from the bottom by filling your sink or a plastic tub with about an inch of water and placing your seed trays in the water so that just the bottom of the seed tray is under water. The water will slowly move up the soil. Remove your trays from the water when you notice the soil surface has darkened.

### **Pests**

As you're watering, check growth points and the undersides of leaves. Be especially mindful of pests if you have houseplants.

Setting up sticky traps near your seedlings will take care of a lot of pests. If you find pests on the seedlings, a light spray of soapy water will usually do the trick.