MAKE YOUR OWN POTS, TRAYS, AND MODULES

Seed sowing is one of the most exciting times of the gardening year, but it's all too easy to bring home mountains of single-use plastic from the garden centre. Reuse old plastic plant pots, trays, and modules where you can, or just avoid it altogether.

Spring has sprung, the sun has some real warmth, and at last you can get the new season under way! At this thrilling time of year, you get to experiment with new varieties, revisit old favourites, and start off whole new planting schemes. And that excitement you get when the first tiny seedling leaves poke above the compost never, ever fades.

DIRECT SOWING

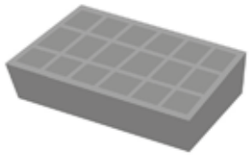
Sowing home-saved seeds straight into shallow drills in the garden is the zero-carbon option. It generally gives the best results, too, as you're raising plants exactly where they will grow, without disturbing the roots.

But emerging seedlings have to dodge an army of hungry slugs and mice, and before mid-spring the soil has rarely hit the 10°C (50°F) minimum required for germination. You can cheat by prewarming the soil – place a glass barn cloche over the top two weeks before sowing. But your growing season is still likely to be shorter, and more beset by pests, than if you sow into pots and trays under cover.

Seed sowing in artificial conditions is highly intensive gardening, though. If you use new plastic trays, pots, and modules (often low grade and short lived for seed sowing), commercial peat-based seed compost, and a propagator heated to a cosy 18–21°C (64–70°F) so you can raise tomatoes in late winter – you quickly rack up an eyewatering carbon footprint.

Luckily, you can still sow seeds under cover, even early in the year, without resorting to any of this.

APPROXIMATELY **500 MILLION PLANT POTS** AND **SEED TRAYS** ARE SOLD IN THE UK EACH YEAR. THE MAJORITY ARE **INCINERATED** OR SENT TO **LANDFILL.**



TAKING THE PLASTIC OUT OF SOWING SEEDS

There are good reasons not to sow into plastic, and they aren't all about the carbon cost; though, for new plastic, made from fossil fuels, that's sky high. Most plastic plant pots these days are made from about 80 per cent recycled plastic, but as plastic can only be recycled once or twice, it ends up in landfill, incinerators, or the oceans eventually.

PLASTIC POTS TAKE ABOUT **450 YEARS** TO **DECOMPOSE.**

"All plastic – even recycled – ends up in landfill, incinerators, or the ocean eventually."

But there are good alternatives to plastic and they are better for your plants. The roots of seedlings grown in porous wood, paper, and cardboard, for instance, grow better. The roots also grow straight through the sides instead of circling into ever-tightening knots. So, you get healthier plants that establish faster and don't contribute to global warming. Choose from among these low-carbon options for seed sowing.

- **Wooden seed trays:** These are no more expensive than plastic if you buy second-hand from auction sites. Or make your own from scrap wood – those are free.
- **Newspaper pots:** You can buy a wooden gadget to make them, or use straight-sided shot glasses to roll strips of newspaper into handy 5cm- (2in)-diameter modules, ideal for sowing and pricking out.
- **Toilet roll tubes:** Save the cardboard tubes from your loo rolls, stand them in a seed tray, and fill with compost to use for sowing large seeds such as beans.
- **Soil blocks:** Compressed blocks of home-made compost make ideal zero-waste seed-starter modules to plant out directly.
- **Cardboard pots:** For larger 10cm (4in) pots, make a box from thin cardboard, held together with paper masking tape.