

Sprouting: How to sprout at home

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If growing sprouts at home, it's important to follow good hygiene practices. The sprouting process can be broken down into six stages:

Step 1. Find a suitable place in your home

A light and airy spot is best, but not in direct sunlight. Sprouting works best somewhere cool and with consistent light levels, such as a north facing window sill or worktop out of the sun. A place with good air circulation is key, choose somewhere with good air flow and don't be tempted to put your sprouting container in a cupboard.

Step 2. Get your equipment ready

It is important that any equipment you use to grow sprouts is thoroughly cleaned from the beginning in hot soapy water. Always remember to wash your hands before handling the equipment, seeds or sprouts too.

Step 3. Soaking

The seeds need to be soaked in water for up to 12 hours first to re-hydrate the seeds and encourage the start of the germination process. First, place the seeds in a bowl or jar. Then, fill with water: use around 2-3 times the amount of water to seeds. Keep them in a dark place at room temperature for 8-12 hours.

Step 4. Rinsing

Once you've soaked your seeds and started the germination process, the next stage is to rinse and drain them until they start sprouting. Use cool water to rinse and do this 2-3 times a day. It is important that you rinse your sprouts frequently to help avoid bacteria build-up. You can find more information above, depending on the type of equipment you are using. Growing sprouts should be kept at around 20°C as the temperature needs to be high enough to encourage germination, but not too high to cause bacteria or mould to grow.

Step 5. Maintaining airflow

After rinsing your seeds, you need to keep them moist to encourage growth, but also to not have them too wet. Keep the seeds relatively spread out to provide good airflow. If you are using a glass jar, try to use one that is long and fairly wide and avoid a small jar where all the seeds are cramped together. When draining, be sure to shake or tap your container to remove as much excess water as possible.

Step 6. Harvesting and storing

Home-grown sprouts such as aduki beans and lentils will be ready to eat in around three days, when a small shoot is just visible. Sprouts such as alfalfa or radish are generally harvested when about 3cm long and will be ready to eat in around six days.

To harvest, give the sprouts a final rinse and drain thoroughly. Sprouts should not be stored wet. One of the most effective way to remove excess moisture is to put the sprouts in a muslin or tea towel. Then, put them in a salad spinner, or pat them dry with kitchen towel, before transferring them to the fridge in a container.

Home-grown sprouts that are ready to eat will last up to five days if kept under the right conditions. Shop-bought sprouts will already have spent time in transit and storage, so will only keep in the fridge for about two days.

The Food Standards Agency recommends that your fridge is kept between 3°C and 5°C to minimise food spoilage. If your sprouts start to discolour and look brown, they have started to go off and should be discarded. If your sprouts develop a sour smell or a sweaty appearance, do not use them. Always thoroughly sterilise your sprouting equipment before starting a new batch.