

## TESTING LEFTOVER SEEDS

Before ordering new flower and vegetable seeds, you may want to test the old seeds you have left over from last year to determine their viability. To do this, follow these steps:

1. Spread a paper towel on a waterproof surface.
2. Wet the paper with water and allow excess water to drip for about a minute.
3. Count 10 seeds and place them on one half of the wet paper towel. (Mix the seed well to insure the sample is representative of the whole seed lot.)
4. Fold the towel over so that the half without the seeds is on top of the seeds.
5. Roll the towel into a moderate tight tube.
6. Put the tube into a zip lock bag and place the bag in a warm spot (70 to 85° F).
7. Make a germination count every two to three days and remove seeds with a visible sprout.

Most vegetable seeds will germinate within one to three weeks depending on the species. At the end of the germination test, the number of seed that germinated represents the percent germination rate. The number of seed that germinated is multiplied by 10 to obtain the germination rate.

If the germination rate is 80 or higher, the seed is very viable. What you do if the germination rate falls between 40 and 80% depends on how much seed you have left, what it would cost to replace it and how much you are depending on the production from that seed. You can compensate for the lower germination rate by sowing seed more thickly and save a significant amount of money by doing so, using the seed makes sense. If you have only a dab of seed left and you will have to buy more anyway, using the old seed probably isn't worthwhile. If the questionable seed is for the main harvest of a primary crop, poor performance could leave you with no time to get new seed and replant in time for the crop to mature.

Ref: MSU Extension, A Simple Seed Germination Test May be a Deal Breaker

The **Master Gardener Hotline** is open from April to October, Monday through Friday. Lines are available 9:00 am to noon and 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm at 888-678-3464

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