

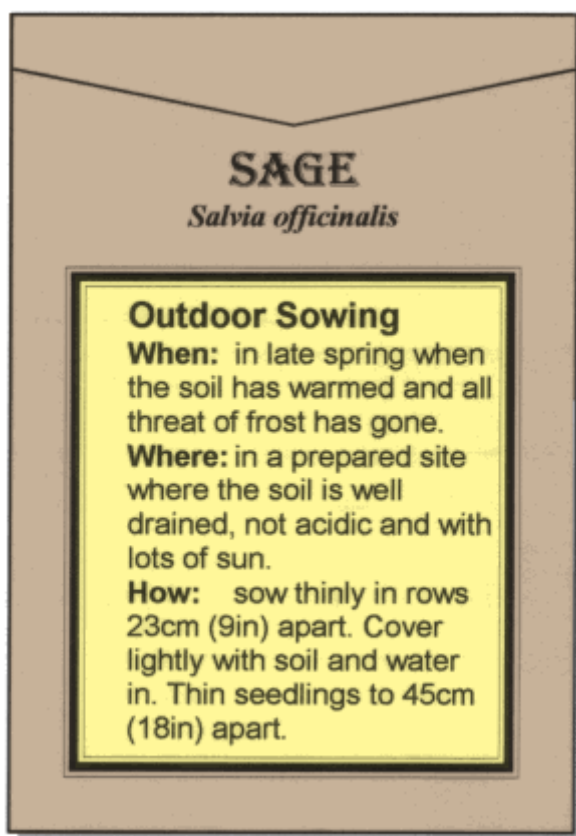
**Sowing herb seeds outdoors** – most annual seeds should be sown in spring, after the ground has a little warmth in it and is not too waterlogged.

The area to be sown should be weed-free. A fork will loosen the ground and then a rake can be used to make a fine top surface or *tilth*.



**TUTOR TALK:** Instructions for sowing and growing will be found on the back of commercially produced seed packets, and of course the requirements for differing herbs should be noted.

An example of instructions is as follows:



Seeds are sown in *drills* or *broadcast*.

**Drills** are small, shallow trenches into which these seeds are sown. They are then re-covered with soil using the back of a rake. The handle of the rake, laid down and pressed gently, will often produce a sufficiently deep channel, otherwise the handle end can be drawn along the channel to increase its depth. Generally, larger seeds need to be buried deeper.

**Broadcast** means scattering the seeds from the hand in a sweeping motion over the ground and then raking the ground. Some seed instructions will state “do NOT cover with soil”, and therefore should not be raked into the ground.

**Sowing herb seeds indoors** – This is the preferred method as it enables the grower to have more control of what is sown and when it is sown.

Seed trays should be filled with seed compost. Purchased compost will generally be either *peat* based or *soil* based.

**Peat based compost** has nutrients added as peat itself has no nutritional value. This is a disadvantage if the peat is to be used for some time as the nourishment will be taken up and away from future growth.

**Soil based compost** is more natural but less pleasant to handle.

**Hand-made compost** particularly suitable for herbs may be made from the following:

- 5 parts fine soil
- 2 parts washed grit or Perlite (organic growing medium)
- 2 parts washed sharp sand
- 3 parts sphagnum moss peat

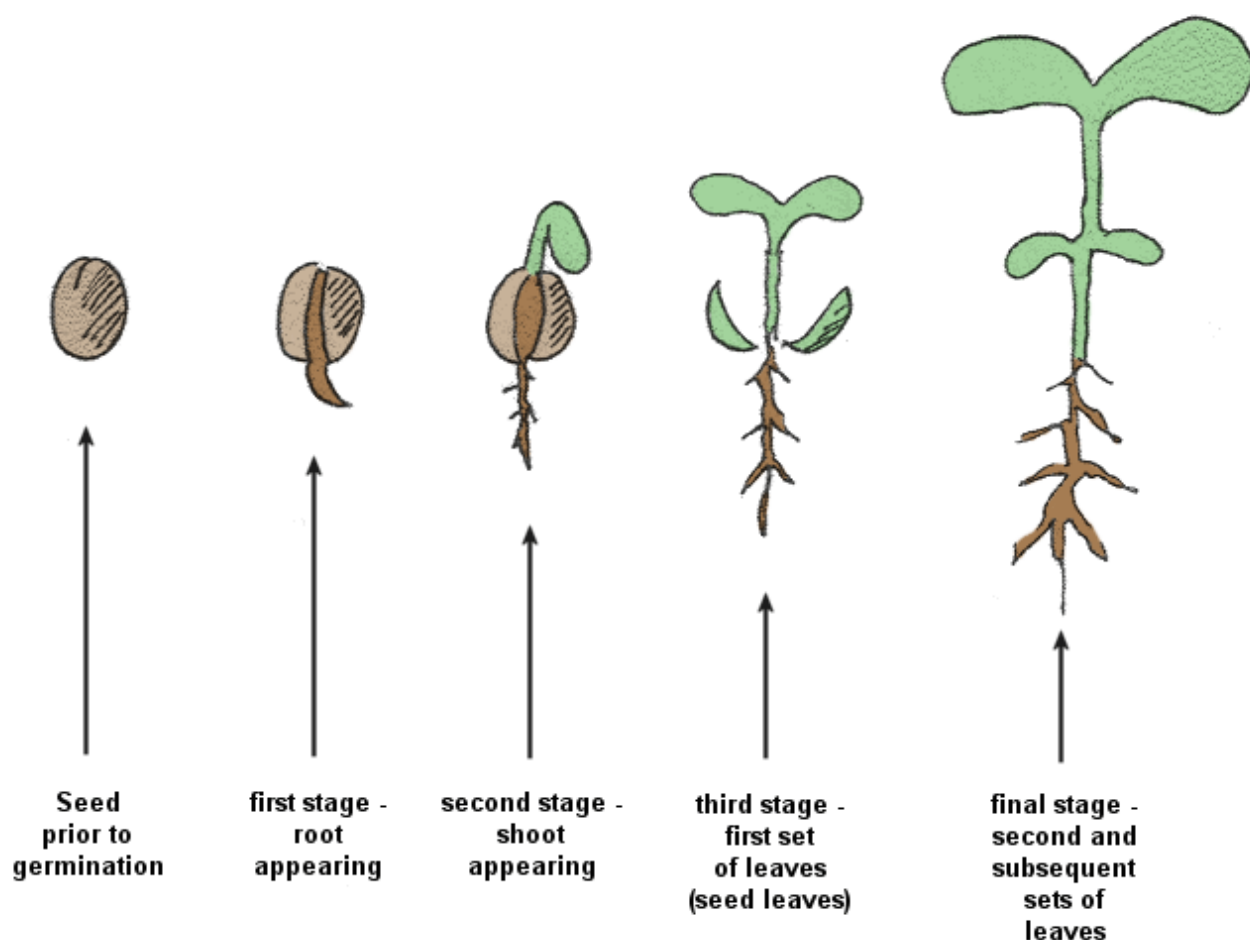
Average seeds will require a compost depth of 3.5cm (1½in), although bigger seeds will require greater depth. It is important to ensure the compost is level, particularly in the corners of the tray. The compost should then be gently firmed, ideally with the base of another tray. Finally, prior to sowing, the compost needs to be well watered and allowed to drain.

As with outdoor sowing, the seeds can be sown in drills or broadcast, or larger seeds can be individually planted. Unless otherwise specified, the seeds should be covered with a light sprinkling of compost, and then lightly sprayed with water.

Once the tray has been completed, a piece of glass should be used to cover it. Alternatively, plastic sheeting or a polythene bag can be used. The purpose of covering is aid moisture retention.

Warmth is required to enable germination. Temperatures of up to 70°F, 20°C are advised. Germination will depend on the variety of herb, being from 5 days to 4 weeks. Good light will be needed, with strong sunlight being shaded by newspaper.

As soon as seedlings emerge, the glass/plastic/polythene cover must be removed to avoid the seedlings becoming spindly. The best seedlings are short and sturdy. The first set of leaves produced actually started life within the seed and will be different to the herbs normal leaves.



Once the seedlings are showing their second or third sets of leaves, their roots will be sufficiently developed that they can withstand transplanting.

**Transplanting** involves transferring seedlings to small plant pots until ready to plant into the ground. This should be done with great care to avoid any root damage. A fork or *widger* will allow seedlings to be gently lifted out of their original compost, and a finger or *dibber* can be used to make small individual holes in the secondary pot's compost. Seedlings must be held gently by their leaves – never held by the stems. They need to be planted at a depth where the seed leaves (first set) are at compost level, and in a hole sufficiently deep to take the root system of the seedling. Having carefully firmed the soil around the seedling, thorough watering will be necessary.

**Hardening off** is the process of introducing the indoor pot-grown young plants to the outdoor environment. The first stage of hardening off is to put the pots outdoors during the day, with the second stage being leaving them outdoors at night also.

**Watering** should be judged by the state of the compost. It should never be allowed to dry out completely, neither should it be allowed to remain soggy.

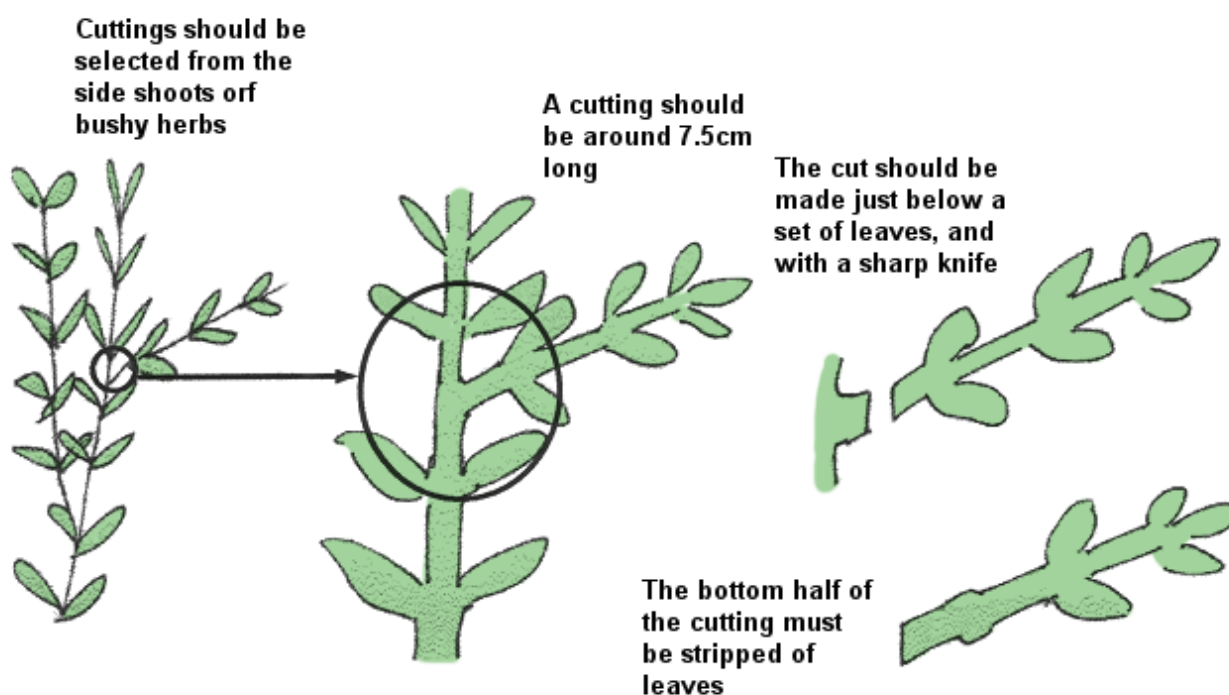
## GROWING HERBS FROM CUTTINGS



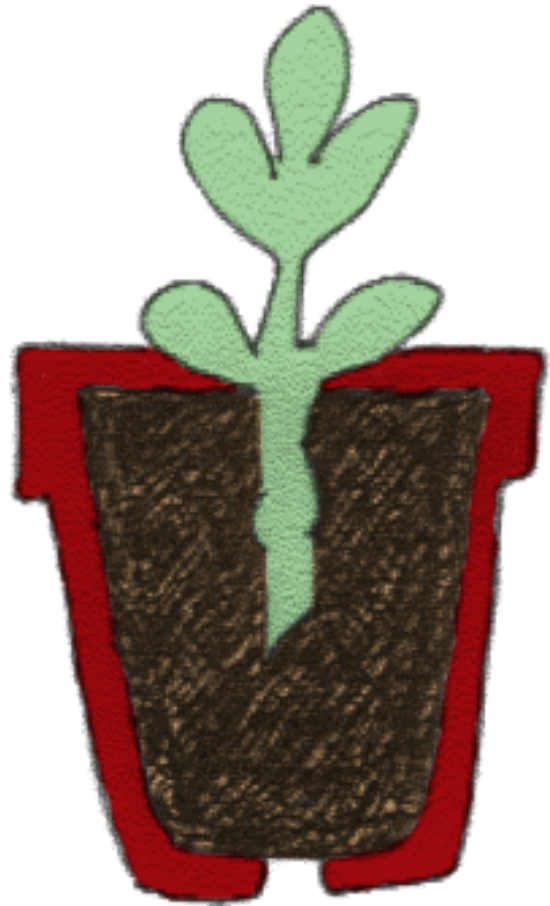
**TUTOR TALK:** The best way to produce new perennial herbs is via *cuttings*.

**Cuttings** are hard or soft wood shoots of plants which, if planted at an appropriate time, will grow into independent plants. Cuttings are taken when the mother plant is in its growing season, and will need to be transferred quickly to reasonably warm soil. If the soil is too cold, the cutting will not be able to develop a root system.

A cutting will need to be around 7.5cm (3in) long, of sturdy good health and without flowers. It should be removed from the mother using a sharp knife, the cut of which needs to be made just under a set of leaves. The lower half of the cutting is then stripped of all leaves.



- A 10cm (4in) pot should be filled with growing medium (Perlite is the best, either on it's own or with 1 part peat)
- A narrow hole should then be made, sufficient to take the width of cutting, to the depth of the stripped length of the cutting
- The growing medium can then be firmed around the cutting, ensuring that the entire hole is filled
- A good watering is required, followed by 24 hours in a cool place
- After 24 hours (recovery period) all cuttings require a warm, moist atmosphere, such as under polythene
- Cuttings may take weeks to grow root systems
- The soil needs to remain damp
- Cuttings may be transplanted when their root systems are established



## ROOT DIVISION

Herbs that have a clumping tendency, such as chives or thyme are best and most easily propagated by root division. This simply involves carefully dividing roots and replanting the two newly generated plants, followed by a thorough watering.