To begin growing plants from seed, buy a packet of seeds or use seeds you have collected from flower heads (see page 30). To assist growth and to avoid disease, treat the seeds with a garlic tonic. Soak 100g fresh, crushed garlic in cold water for one hour. Place the seeds on gauze from a first aid kit and tie into a little ‘bag’. Soak in a tonic for 15 minutes and then allow the seeds to dry on newspaper. Plant the next morning. Note: Do not use this tonic on cabbage, pea and bean seeds.

Sowing seeds
Sow seeds into seed trays or directly into a bed containing a well prepared growing mixture (see box). Prepare the bed a week in advance by hoeing and removing large stones and weeds. Rake in matured compost to a depth of about 5cm. Cover the ground with mulch (see page 45). Just before sowing, hoe again to kill any weeds that may have germinated in the meantime. Push aside the mulch to a distance of 5cm to mark a planting row and then sow the seeds.

Always follow the instructions given on the seed package for the depth of planting. If you plant the seeds too deep, the seedlings will be weak, causing them to damp off (fall over and die). Also, if seeds have been planted too shallowly, they may dry up very quickly and wilt and die.

Watering seeds
Keep the soil where the seeds are sown moist at all times, whether the seeds are sown in seed trays or directly into a garden bed. However, overwatering also disturbs seed growth by moving the seeds. For the best growth, water lightly both in the morning and the evening to keep the soil moist. Use a fine spray – you can make a watering device out of a 2-litre cold drink bottle.

Correct hand watering uses less water and produces healthy seedlings:
• When watering with a watering can, first tip the can over a non-seeded adjacent area and, for a couple of seconds, allow the water to flow out fully. Then, immediately swing the can right across the seed trays or seed
bed, and back again, so that the falling water is applied evenly. Make sure the end of first swing takes place past the end of the seed bed to avoid dribbles.

- Start watering on the part of the seed bed furthest away from you. Continue the swings but step backwards so that a nearer area of seeds is watered on the next swing.
- If you see any sign of puddling, instantly swing the watering can away from the seeds.
- Make sure the last of the water in the watering can does not fall on the seeds, as damaging heavy drops of water occur at this stage.
- Allow the water to move down into the soil. Then repeat the watering.

Transplanting seedlings
You can sow seeds in a mixture of sand and vermiculite (available at hardware stores) in a seed tray, and transplant into the garden later on. Handle them with care when you transplant them into garden beds, as any damage will delay growth and make them weak so that they catch diseases.

Growing mixture for seedlings
Sow your seeds into one of the following mixtures:
- One part matured leaf-mould or commercial potting soil and one part perlite or river sand or coarse sawdust.
- One part matured compost, one part loose garden soil and one part vermiculite or coarse sawdust.
- One part matured compost, two parts potting or garden soil and one part rotted, sifted manure.

See page 20 to find out how to make compost.

WATER WISE TIP: Correct hand watering uses less water and produces healthy seedlings.