

# Starting Martagon Seeds

By Bill Bauer

Seeds of martagon species and hybrids are classified as DH (Delayed Hypogeal) germination. DH seeds require approximately three months (55-65 degrees is best) during which time a bulblet will develop. Following that warm period, a cold period (fridge temp will work) is required before the bulblet will produce a leaf.

Use about a ½ cup commercial mix of peat, vermiculite and other additives in a Ziploc sandwich bag. Most seed starting mixes will work OK. I recommend that a mix without Perlite be used because it is much less difficult to check for bulblet growth. The mix should be moist but not wet. If you are able to squeeze more than drops from a handful, it is more wet than necessary. Drop the seeds on top of the mix in the bag but don't shake the bag and imbed the seeds in the mix because you want to observe what occurs during the first month. After the first week or so, you will notice a swelling of the seeds. That is an indicator that there is enough moisture. Be sure to check every bag after a month because martagons will on occasion produce seeds that will germinate immediately and begin to produce a shoot and leaf. Should you get early germination, the only way to save those seedlings is to pot them and place them under lights. Extract only the seedlings that germinate early from the bag and leave the other seeds to grow on as DH. Keep the bags in a closed box during the first three months. Temperatures above 65 and below 45-50 will slow or stop bulblet development. Check the bags monthly and take whatever notes seem relevant. After approximately three months check for bulblet size. If most bulblets in the bag are around 1/8 inch in diameter or larger and producing roots they are ready for their cold period. Sometimes it will take 4 months or even longer for bulblets to produce roots. If none of the bulblets in the bag have roots, wait on the cold period until they do.

The cold period can be in the temperature range provided by your refrigerator. If you could provide a temperature slightly above freezing, that would be perfect. Keep the bags in a box so they remain as dark as possible. The cold period should be at least 3 months but it's better if you could stretch that out to four months. The seedling will have a better chance of surviving the first real winter. The problem that can occur with average refrigerator temperatures is early shoot development. That can occur as early as 2 months. Again, it is best to react as soon as noticed because it is very difficult to transition the seedling to a normal pot or outside environment if it has a shoot longer than an inch or so.

Martagons will produce a single leaf during the first year. The bulblet will be near the surface for some time and it is necessary to retain that surface moisture for the seedling to retain the leaf as long as possible. By the third year you could see a short stem and possibly, but not often, a flower. Most will flower during years 4 or 5.