

Grow a Bean in a Bag: Watch Roots Sprout in Your Window

Science | Spring | Ages 4-7

Last March, my daughter pressed her nose against our kitchen window every morning for a week, watching a lima bean crack open and send out a tiny white root. She named it Gerald. This is that kind of project—the one that turns your four-year-old into a botanist who checks on her bean before breakfast.

You need almost nothing, and it works. Really works.

What You Need

- 1 dried bean (lima beans are easiest to find, but kidney or pinto work too)
 - 1 paper towel
 - 1 ziplock bag (sandwich size)
 - Water
 - Tape
 - A sunny window

We grabbed our beans from the bulk section at Sprouts on 119th Street. A quarter's worth gives you enough for three attempts if the first one doesn't cooperate.

How to Do It

Fold the paper towel so it fits inside the ziplock bag. Wet it thoroughly—like wring-it-out wet, then unfold it so it's damp but not dripping. Slide the bean between the paper towel and the side of the bag, about halfway down. You want it visible through the plastic.

Seal the bag most of the way, leaving a small gap for air. Tape it to a window that gets decent sun. South-facing works great. We used our kitchen window overlooking the backyard.

Now you wait. Check it daily. In 3-5 days, you'll see a root poke out. The bean will crack. A day or two later, a shoot heads up. Kids lose their minds over this.

What We Learned

Don't let the paper towel dry out. If it does, add a few drops of water through the opening and reseal. Happened to us on day four during that weird dry spell we had in April.

Not every bean sprouts. Sometimes they're duds. Keep two or three bags going so you don't deal with disappointment.

Once the plant has a few leaves and strong roots, you can transplant it into a pot with soil. We did this with Gerald and he lived on our back deck until July. Your kid will feel like a wizard.

The Science Part (Keep It Simple)The bean has everything the baby plant needs stored inside. Water wakes it up. Roots grow down for stability and water. The shoot grows up toward light. It's the most basic, perfect example of germination, and seeing it happen in real time beats any diagram in a book.

This is the project to pull out on a rainy Saturday when everyone's restless. It takes five minutes to set up and gives you a

week of something to wonder about together.

