MR. GROW IT

AUTOFLOWER TIPS

How to grow an autoflower indoors without stunting it: medium, container, transplanting, light cycle, feeding and training, from what I've tested myself.

The clock • Medium and container • Transplanting • Light cycle • Feeding and pH • Training

The short version

This guide is for growing autoflowers indoors. An autoflower flowers on its own clock. Whatever happens in the first few weeks, it flowers anyway, so there's no "veg another week to recover." Every tip in here comes down to one idea: don't slow the plant down early. Airy medium, the right container from day one, easy on the food, 18 hours of light, and gentle training.

Where I'm coming from. I'm mostly a photoperiod grower. I've grown somewhere around two dozen autoflowers, run a few side-by-sides, and had a lot of dedicated autoflower growers on Garden Talk. This guide is what I've tested and what has held up. Where something is still debated, I say so.

The numbers, up front.

	What I run / what I've seen
Seed to harvest	Depends on the genetics. About 75 days for the autoflowers I've grown. The fastest ones finish in 55 to 60.
Final container	5 gallon fabric for me. Some autoflower growers go bigger, 7 gallon or more, and plant the seed straight in.
Light cycle	18 on / 6 off. I tried 24/0 and saw no difference except the power bill.
Water pH	6.0 to 6.5 in soil. 5.8 in coco.
Training	Low stress training. In my own test it beat no training, and topping came last.
Transplant	Only if you do it on time and gently. Late is worse than never.

SECTION 01

The clock

What makes an autoflower different, and why every mistake costs more.

A photoperiod plant flowers when you change the light to 12/12. An autoflower typically starts to flower around day 30 from sprout, no matter what the lights are doing. That’s the whole trick and the whole problem.

- **Fast.** Around 75 days sprout to harvest is normal. Some genetics do it in 55 to 60. Going autoflowers only, you can fit a whole extra cycle into a year.
- **No second chances.** If a photo gets stunted, you veg it another week or two and it catches up. An autoflower flowers anyway. A setback in the first few weeks shows up as a smaller plant at harvest.
- **Every seed is its own plant.** There’s no real cloning with autoflowers. You can, but with the clock running you get little out of it. So every autoflower is a different phenotype, and two plants from the same pack can grow nothing alike.
- **Not always the easiest plant to learn on.** Autoflowers are sold as beginner plants. You have a lot more control with photos. If you’re brand new, autoflowers are fine, just know the clock is against you when something goes wrong.

The one rule

Don’t slow the plant down early. Medium, container, water, food, light, training: every section below is a way to avoid a stunt in the first three to four weeks. Get through those clean and the autoflower does the rest.

SECTION 02

Medium and container

Get these two right on day one and you skip most autoflower problems.

Airy medium

Check your medium first. An airy mix puts more oxygen in the root zone and you get faster growth off the start. That matters more on an autoflower than a photo because the start is all you get. For seedlings I've had the best results in BioFlower soil for several years now; they thrive on that alone. If you're in a heavier bagged soil, cut it with perlite. Some of the most vigorous autoflowers I've seen were in coco, where the roots get all that oxygen; those are the ones that run into height problems, not size problems.

Container size

- **Plant in the container you'll harvest in.** I often times run 5 gallon containers for autoflowers. The growers pulling the biggest autoflowers go 5 gallon or larger, some 7, and drop the seed straight in. No transplant, no shock.
- **Bigger container, longer the food lasts.** A charged soil like Ocean Forest feeds the plant for the first few weeks. More soil means more food and a longer runway before you have to feed. A 3 gallon runs out sooner than a 5.
- **The catch with a big container:** a seedling in 5 gallons of wet soil can't drink it. Water a small circle around the stem, not the whole container, until the roots spread.

If you amend

When I add amendments to pre-mixed soil, I go lighter than the package says because potting mixes such as Ocean Forest already have food in it: a quarter cup of dry organic nutrient into 3 gallons of soil. Keep it moist and let it cook about two weeks so the microbes break the amendments into something the plant can use. I've done 12 days and been fine.

My seedling setup

Solo cup, airy soil, sitting on an automatic watering tray. The tray keeps the cup from ever going bone dry, which is one of the quiet ways a seedling gets stunted. The airy medium keeps it from staying soggy. If you start in a cup, the next section is about getting out of it on time.

SECTION 03

Transplanting

One of the most argued topics in autoflowers. Here's both sides and what I actually do.

Some people say never transplant an autoflower, it'll cost you yield. Others transplant every time as long as they're careful with the roots. For years I erred on the side of caution and didn't transplant autoflowers at all. Since then I've done both, cup to final container and straight into the final container, and I don't have a strong opinion either way. What I do have is a rule: **if you transplant, do it on time.** A plant that gets root-bound in a small container stunts just as hard as one that gets shocked in a transplant, and on an autoflower you don't get that time back.

Why people transplant anyway

- Direct access to the roots. Mycorrhizal fungi work best in direct contact with the root ball, and a transplant is your one chance to put it there.
- A fresh medium is a feed. Moving up into new amended soil gives the plant a new bank of nutrients.
- Space. A tray of cups takes a lot less room than a row of 5 gallon containers for the first week or two.

How I do it

Step	What I do
1	Fill the new container partway, set the old container into it and pack soil around. Pull the old container out and you have a perfectly shaped hole.
2	Sprinkle mycorrhizal fungi into the hole. A quarter cup of worm castings in the bottom of the hole is a good move too; I do it on photos as well.
3	Squeeze the sides of the old container to loosen the plant and slide it out. Don't pull on the stem.
4	Mist the roots with water, then sprinkle mycorrhizae straight onto the root ball. Wet roots hold it better.
5	Set the plant in the hole, press it down a little, add soil on top, press again.
6	Water slowly until you get a little runoff. Then leave it alone.

Timing from my own run: plant into a solo cup, into the final 5 gallon around day 12. Cup to final container in one move, around the time the leaves reach the edge of the cup, is a simple path.

SECTION 04

Light cycle

18/6 is the answer. Here's what I tested and why.

Autoflowers will flower under 18/6, 20/4 or 24/0. I've run 24/0 and 18/6 side by side and didn't see a difference in the plants. I did see one in my electric bill. So I run 18 on, 6 off. I'm sure someone in deep water culture with everything dialed in gets a few more ounces on 24/0. For most tents it isn't worth it.

The one thing I'm sure of: don't run autoflowers on 12/12. I was forced to once, autoflowers and photos sharing a tent, and the autoflowers came out noticeably worse than they would have on 18/6.

	Case for 24/0	Case for 18/6
Environment	Lights never go off, so no temperature or humidity swing at lights-out. Big swings could potentially stress a plant toward herming.	You need a humidifier or dehumidifier to hold the room steady overnight.
The plant	Nothing lost that I could measure.	Plants do work in the dark: root exudates go down.
Cost	Six more hours of power every day, all run.	Cheaper.

Intensity

I don't have autoflower-specific PPFD targets I'd put my name on. Treat an autoflower like a photo in veg for the first few weeks and don't blast it; a seedling under a light at full power is another way to stunt it. Use the recommended light distance on your light's listing, which is what 98% of growers do, or a meter if you have one. The PPFD numbers by tent size and stage are in my grow pack.

If you're just starting out

No money for a humidifier or dehumidifier yet? 24/0 is the easier way to keep the room stable, and stability matters more than the dark period for a first run. Switch to 18/6 once you can hold the environment steady.

SECTION 05

Feeding and pH

Autoflowers and nutrients is a debated topic. Here’s where I land.

Do autoflowers need less food?

You’ll hear both. Some growers run the same chart as their photos. Others cut it in half, and one grower I spoke with burned the leaf tips on an autoflower within a week at full strength. My take: a lot of it is genetics. Some autoflowers grow massive and some stay squat, and a smaller plant needs less food. Start light and let the plant tell you.

- **Charged soil means no food at first.** In an enriched bag like Ocean Forest you don’t need to feed right away. Water only for the first few weeks.
- **Organics are slow.** Amendments and top-dresses need microbes to break them down before the plant can use them, and that takes time an autoflower doesn’t have. If you see a deficiency on an autoflower, go to something fast-acting rather than waiting on a top-dress.
- **Read PPM in and out.** What goes in isn’t what comes out. A 500 PPM feed can run off at 1,000 because the medium already holds food. When growing with synthetic nutrients, I log pH and PPM every feed and base the next one on the last runoff reading. And remember organic nutrients in the bag don’t show on a meter until they’re broken down, so PPM is a rough tool, not a rule.
- **Nutrient lines I’ve had good luck growing autoflowers with:** Fox Farm trio, Blue Planet Nutrients, and Stash Nutrients. The line matters less than going easy early.

pH, the mistake I made

Growing organic, I ignored pH. My tap water is 7.5. Run that in long enough and the soil pH drifts up until the plant can’t take up nutrients, and you’re chasing deficiencies that aren’t really deficiencies. Soil biology corrects a little on its own, but not that much. Now I adjust the water: **6.0 to 6.5 in soil, 5.8 in coco.** Some people’s tap is over 8. Check yours once.

SECTION 06

Training

I ran the test. Low stress training won.

About ten years ago I grew ten Caramelicious autoflowers from seed and split them three ways: some grew naturally, some got low stress training, some got topped. Not a lab, just my tent, and every seed was its own phenotype. But the result has held up on every autoflower I've grown since.

Training	Per plant	What happened
None, Christmas-tree style	5 to 6 oz	Fine. One big cola, the rest smaller.
Low stress training	7 to 8 oz	Even canopy, even cola size. Best result I've had on an autoflower.
Topped	4 to 5 oz	Worst of the three. The stunt from topping cost more than the extra tops gave back.

Low stress training

- Around day 7 after the first transplant, once there are a few nodes, bend the main stem over and tie it to the rim of the container with a soft garden tie and a clip.
- Then keep adjusting. On my transplant run I tied her down once, life got busy, and I never moved the tie. She barely spread. The tie-down is a daily thing for a couple of weeks, not a one-time thing.
- The point is an even canopy so every cola gets light and air. A single tall cola is also the one that gets bud rot.

Topping

Still controversial. Topping gives you height control and a flatter canopy, and some growers swear by it. The other side says any stunt on an autoflower costs yield, and my own test agrees. If you want to top, do it once, early, on a plant that's clearly ahead of the others, and compare it to one you left alone. That's the only way to know what your genetics do.

Stunt checklist

How I've seen autoflowers get set back: a late or rough transplant · root-bound in a small container · topping · a deficiency organics fix too slowly · pH drift from untreated water · humidity swings at lights-off · the wrong light cycle. Walk that list before you blame the seed.

Finishing. Look at the trichomes, not the breeder's day count. In the last few weeks I run the room drier, 1.5 to 1.6 kPa VPD, to keep bud rot off those dense autoflowers. When to chop, dry and cure → mrgrowit.com: when to harvest

Where to go next

- The light, environment and feeding numbers I run, in one place → mrgrowit.com/grow-pack
- The gear I actually use → mrgrowit.com/equipment
- My transplant video, start to finish → Transplanting Autoflower Cannabis Plants