Polygonum tinctorium
Instructions for Starting Seeds, Transplanting, and General Growing Guidelines

Polygonum tinctorium likes a neutral, well-drained soil, full sun, and weekly watering. This is a brief outline of how I grow indigo. It is not the only way - seeds could be started in flats or the plants raised in planters/pots, etc. There’s really no right or wrong so long as your indigo gets lots of sun, enough water and fertilizer.

SEED PLANTING
- Start seeds in greenhouse 5-6 weeks before last frost date for earliest outdoor planting.
- Soil is tilled and mixed with composted manure and a balanced organic fertilizer.
- Create beds of soil by shaping treated soil into meter length rectangles or simply use planting trays.
- Broadcast seed densely on soil, sprinkle on top of bed, there should not be much room between seeds.
- Cover with sand, enough to cover them but don’t bury them, maybe ¼ inch maximum on top and tamp/pat it down.
- Seed cloth (spun bond) non woven some synthetic fiber thin cloth to keep wind/bugs out and moisture (agribon), helps them grow (isn’t necessary) greatly helps growth quality.
- Water the seeds/seedlings daily.

Above: The seedling bed after seeds have been covered with sand.

Right: The seedlings just before transplanting. Note how densely they’re grown.
SEED PLANTING (continued)
- Remove all weeds
- After approximately 5-6 weeks, the seedlings are ready for transplanting.

PREPARING THE FIELD
- A week or two before transplanting, prepare the field.
- Spread LOTS of well composted manure as well as a balanced organic fertilizer. I also add composted/mulched indigo stems. EM bacteria can also be a plus.
- Till well to creating loose soil so the indigo plants have room to spread their roots. *Polygonum tinctorium* likes well-drained soil, so avoid compaction.

TRANSPLANTING
- Transplant outdoors after last threat of frost
- Just prior to transplanting, create rows in the tilled soil 80cm apart across the entire growing space by making a divet with a hoe.
- Before pulling up seedlings, generously water seedling bed until it’s soaked. This combined with the sand will make the seedlings easy to remove without too much root damage.
- Pull seedlings in small bunches by grabbing them near the base. Try to keep them orderly for easy transport and transplanting.

*Left:* Pulling up seedlings from the base in small groups.  
*Right:* Bundling seedlings.
TRANSPLANTING (continued)
- Tie a good handful into a bundle and dip the bundles’ roots in water. Put the bundles in a box or container for easy transporting to field.
- Once all your seedlings are harvested and at the field, make your way down each row placing 5-7 seedlings at a time into the tilled divet with about 30-40 cm between each group of plants.
- Place the roots of the seedlings at the bottom of the divet. Let the stems rest on one side of the divet and scoop dirt from the opposite side onto the roots and majority of the stem of the seedling so that it holds the bunch in place and only the leaves stick out. *Polygonum tinctorium* is a noded plant and will root from the nodes on the stem, so burying them simply helps the plant to root better. Leaving the stems exposed to harsh sunlight when they’re young like this will kill them, so bury them deep.
- Step on the mound of dirt over the seedlings to pack the dirt down securely. Don’t worry - they can take it.

Transplanting seedlings

CARING FOR TRANSPLANTED SEEDLINGS
- Water well once transplanted - as described below.
- 2-3 weeks & again 5-6 weeks after transplanting, cultivate between rows to keep down weeds. When cultivating, hoe up dirt around the base of the plants. Before cultivating, feed plants with a balanced organic fertilizer.
- Hoeing up the dirt around the bases of the plant creates a raised bed and allows for more rooting from the nodes.
- *Polygonum tinctorium* likes a good weekly rain. If mother nature is not cooperating, water well - ideally overnight to mimic a good rain. Watering at night also helps avoid evaporation and the potential to steam your plants’ roots to death on a hot summer day.
- Spray plants every other week with fish and kelp emulsion (foliar feed - they love it!)