

Winter Sowing

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What Is Winter Sowing?

- starting plants from seed outdoors in the winter months
- germinates the seeds in miniature “greenhouses” placed outside. The greenhouses, made out of gallon jugs, etc. offer a controlled environment and protect the seedlings from freezing temperatures
- allows the natural conditions of your local climate to start the growth process
- produces hardy (and hardened off) plants

Seed Coat



Herbs for Winter Sowing

- *Borage
- *Chamomile
- Chervil
- Chives
- Cilantro/coriander
- *Dill
- Fennel
- * Self Seeding Annuals
- Lavender
- Lemon balm
- Lovage
- Mint
- Oregano
- Rosemary
- Rue
- Sage
- Summer savory
- Sweet marjoram
- Tarragon
- Thyme

Vegetables for Winter Sowing

Alliums

Arugula

Asian Greens

*Beans

#Beets

Brassicas

* Warm Season Veggies

Often Direct Sown

#Carrots

Celery

Celeriac

Chard

*Corn

*Curcubits

Lettuce

Parsnips

#Peas

#Radish

Flowers for Winter Sowing

Flowers that are described as:

- perennials
- ones that self-sow
- ones that require stratification, refrigeration or prechilling
- ones that can be sown outdoors in early spring or late fall while frosts can occur
- Natives, wildflowers

[From: What Is Winter Sowing? A Simple Guide To Jump-Start Your Seed Planting \(backyardgardenlover.com\)](#)

How to Winter Sow

1. Acquire greenhouse tools (milk/juice jugs, cloches).



How to Winter Sow

2. Drill or cut holes in the bottom and top as needed.
3. Cut jugs in half, leaving a small (1/2-1") section intact.



Teamwork



Prepared Jugs



How to Winter Sow (cont.)

4. Identify seeds to be sown.
5. Fill container with seed starting mix (no fertilizer) at least 3-4 inches deep.
6. Moisten soil.



How to Winter Sow (cont.)

7. Place seeds on soil.
8. Cover with soil the depth of the seed size.
9. Moisten (lightly spray) soil from top.
10. Insert label with name of plant and date.



How to Winter Sow (cont.)

11. Tape container shut.
12. Label outside of container with name or number/date.
13. Place outside in sun where it will experience the elements.



Completed Jug



How to Winter Sow (cont.)

14. Check for moisture and if dry, gently water.
15. I like to put my jugs in a line (or two or three) and sort them into two groups as they germinate.
16. Trust Mother Nature. I cover if seeds have germinated and the temperature is in low 20's at night.
17. Once seed has germinated and grown a second set of leaves it is ready to plant into the ground or pots.

Learnings

Sowing 100 jugs at one time is too many for transplanting in spring

Don't plant so many seeds in one jug

Clear plastic is hard to put holes in

Once germination has begun, separate into two groups - germinated and not germinated

Learnings

Label each plant/flat when transplanted

Trust mother nature

Be patient

Observe how things happen in the garden to determine timing of planting

Fork is a favorite transplant tool

Natives generally have quicker, more vigorous root growth and need to be transplanted earlier

Learnings

Grandkids/family members can be a big help - filling dirt, drilling holes (teens), spreading seeds, watering, etc.

It can be an indoor activity, and therefore can be done by the elderly, handicapped, etc.

Complete prep work (identifying seeds to plant, gathering tools/materials, cutting and creating drainage holes in jugs) before planting

Painters' tape worked better than any other kind of tape

Learnings

When transplanting seedlings with tangled roots, either cut the root mass into pieces to plant into the ground, or divide into smaller quantities and repot into larger pots. The repotted roots will grow deeper, spread out, and then can be separated.

It doesn't have to be perfect (seed depth, taping job, cutting job, hole punching). The seeds want to grow! And Mother Nature knows what to do.

Learnings

Translucent jugs can generally be used two years before the sun starts to break down the plastic. Wash with soap at the end of the first season(not necessary to bleach or in any other way sanitize jugs to use the next time). If you let the jugs sit without washing they become more difficult to clean.

Learnings

When storing jugs, put them into plastic bags or otherwise protect them from getting dirty so you don't have to wash them again the next winter.

Potting soil generally has fertilizer, which newly germinated seeds do not need and may encourage them to grow too quickly and be weaker. Seed starting mix is the best. I prefer organic, but that is an individual choice.

The End (Results)

