

WINTER SEED SOWING

Winter seed sowing is the act of planting seeds outdoors in a closed container (we recommend a milk jug) during the winter months, resulting in hearty spring seedlings.

PUT MY SEEDS OUTSIDE? IN THE WINTER?

When undisturbed, seeds fall off the plant in summer or fall, become dormant underneath the chilly winter snow, and finally germinate in the warmth of spring. The chilly conditions of winter are actually vital in the germination process, because the seeds undergo **cold stratification**.

Winter seed sowing is simply replicating this natural process in a controlled environment (the container), which protects the seeds from predators and the harshest elements of winter.

Cold stratification is a process through which the seed coat breaks down from winter temperatures. It involves a period of exposure to cold and moisture. Many types of perennials have seeds that require cold stratification in order for them to germinate.



WHAT ARE THE STEPS?



Step 1- Preparing your container:

First, find a container to use. We recommend plastic milk jugs because of their handle, size, and opaque plastic (which minimizes the sun's intensity in early spring). Unscrew the lid and throw it away; the open top allows precipitation and fresh air to enter the container. Cut the milk jug almost completely in half, leaving an inch or two intact right below the handle as a hinge. Then poke drainage holes in the bottom of the jug.

Step 2- Sow your seeds:

Add about 3-4 inches of soil to the jug. Lightly moisten the soil and make sure the water drains properly. If it does, you are ready to sow your seeds! Depth and spacing of your seeds will depend on the species. When you are done sowing, label the jug with waterproof marker and seal it shut with tape.



Step 3- Let nature do its thing

Place your prepared container outside. It is best to do this when temperatures are consistently cold; otherwise, the seeds may emerge from dormancy early. Once they are outside, all you need to do is occasionally check to make sure the seeds are receiving adequate moisture and that the drainage holes are working.

Step 4- Transplant!

When temperatures hit 50°F-60°F, especially if it is sunny, remove the tops of the jugs so the seedlings won't wilt. Cover again in the evenings. When the seedlings produce at least two sets of true leaves, move them into individual containers to let the roots develop. Finally, transplant them into your garden when they become hearty seedlings!



WHY SHOULD I WINTER SEED SOW?

Winter seed sowing is an easy, simple, and inexpensive way to grow seedlings early! You are able to germinate your seeds several weeks ahead of directly sowing in your garden, plus you get the satisfaction of gardening all year round! Because of their exposure to the natural elements, seedlings grown in this way are typically very hardy and robust. You can be confident that your winter sown seedlings will thrive in your garden!