

January 29, 2022 Garden Club of Norfolk Winter Sowing Workshop

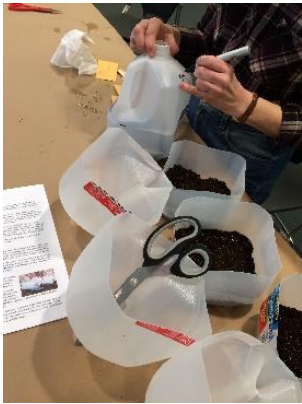
Your winter Sowing Kit includes:

- A pre-cut and punched milk or water jug
- 1 qt. damp germinating soil
- Seeds for Butterfly Weed and Purple Coneflower – or use your own seeds
- Craft stick for labeling
- Duct tape to close the container
- Directions for winter sowing

WINTER SOWING

Adapted from: [Winter-Sowing! – Kevin Lee Jacobs \(agardenforthehouse.com\)](http://Winter-Sowing!-KevinLeeJacobs.agardenforthehouse.com)

You can start your summer garden in December - February and beyond, using a neat trick called “Winter-Sowing.” Winter-sowing is an outdoor method of seed germination (invented by Trudi Davidoff) which requires just two things: miniature greenhouses (made from recycled water and milk jugs) and Mother Nature. You can winter-sow your way to a beautiful garden. Here’s how:



Make a Greenhouse. You can make a greenhouse from any number of clear or translucent plastic containers. It uses recyclables - gallon-size milk and water jugs. ½ gallon ones work too, but experience has shown that quart ones are just too small. Use kitchen scissors or a pen-knife to cut around the middle, almost all the way through. The uncut half-inch or so will serve as a hinge. Remove the cap from the jug and discard as it is not used.

Next, punch out drainage holes in the bottom and top of the jug. Use an ice pick, awl, hammer and nail, or hot glue gun (without glue) to make holes in the bottom of the container. You can also use a Phillips screwdriver, heated over a flame at the stove, to facilitate the hole-punching job. These holes provide important ventilation and drainage to prevent excess heat from building up in the greenhouse and baking the seeds to death. The drainage holes keep the seedlings from drowning.

Select the Right Soil. It is essential to use a moist, light, fluffy, well-draining potting mixture. A commercial seed starting or peat-moss and perlite mix is fine. Pour the soil, preferably to a depth of 2 to 3 inches, into the container. Save a bit if your seeds require covering after planting. Water the Soil. Moisten the mix thoroughly, and then let it drain.

Sow the Seeds. Sow your seeds thinly on the soil surface. Cover the seeds with more soil, when necessary, to achieve the proper planting depth. Gently pat the mix down, so that seeds and soil make good contact. Place a plant label inside the milk jug as the outside label may wear off before spring. Then replace the lid, and secure it with a strip of duct tape, as illustrated.



In a cold climate, plant your perennial and hardy annual seeds first. Should these sprout during a weird warm-spell in winter, they will not be harmed. Wait until March to plant tender annuals, and April for tomatoes.

Remember to Label - Inside and out! For each sowing, indicate with a permanent marker (or a paint-pen) the seed variety and date sown. Do not omit these steps, for there is nothing worse than finding, in spring, dozens of miniature greenhouses brimming with seedlings, and not knowing what they are! You can also keep track by writing down even more information in a notebook where you record the progress of your seedlings.

Bring the Greenhouse Outdoors. Your planted and labeled greenhouse is now ready to brave the outdoor elements. Select a location that is safe from strong wind, but where sun, rain and snow will be freely admitted. For further protection from tipping, place them in a large plastic box or plant tray, with drainage holes melted or punched in the bottom, or set jugs against a fence.



Relax! Now sit back and let Nature take over. As the weather chills and warms, your seeds will freeze and thaw. These natural actions loosen the seed-coatings. This is why advance soaking or nicking of hard-shelled seeds, such as Morning Glories and Sweet Peas, is not necessary when you winter-sow.

.At the first kiss of spring, but while nights are still freezing, seedlings will begin to emerge. This is the time to check for water. Open the tops, and if the soil appears dry, moisten thoroughly but gently, so as not to disturb tender root systems. Then close the tops. On warm, sunny days, open the tops for hours at a time, and let the seedlings enjoy the fresh spring air. The tops, of course, are closed at dusk.

Unlike windowsill-germinated seedlings, which often are frail and spindly, winter-sown seeds grow up to be strong, sturdy plants, completely prepared for glorious careers in the open garden. Because they are grown outdoors you do not need to harden them off prior to planting.

WHAT TO SOW AND WHEN

January through February:

Flowering Perennials & Hardy Annuals- If it is hardy in your zone or reseeds you can plant the seeds now:

They are fine in snow and cold and will sprout when the time is right.

Flowers:

Foxglove, Evening Primrose, Larkspur), Columbine, Monarda (Bee Balm), Milkweed, Butterfly Weed, Nepeta, Hollyhock, Nicotiana (Flowering Tobacco), Balloon Flower, Lupine, Bachelor Buttons

Vegetables & Herbs

Spinach, Kale, Brussels sprouts, Peas, Broccoli, Thyme, Sage, Oregano, Cilantro

March:

Tender Annuals, Vegetables & Herbs - cover if sprouted and a hard frost occurs.

Impatiens, Cosmos, Zinnia, Marigolds
Lettuce, Bok Choy, Beets, Carrots, Basil
Parsley

April

Plants that thrive in very warm temperatures - cover if sprouted and a hard frost occurs.

Tomatoes
Peppers
Eggplant

TRANSPLANTING WINTER-SOWN SEEDLINGS

Do you have milk-jugs filled with annuals and perennials achieved from winter-sowing? It's time to give some of these naturally hardened-off seedlings permanent positions in the open garden. Here is a tip for releasing them from their milk-jug greenhouse all in one clump and some techniques to use for separating and transplanting the youngsters.

To release the young plants from their milk-jug greenhouse: cut a flap in the side of the venue. Then tilt the container. Out will come soil and plants, all in one clump.

Separate the plants by pulling plants apart, pull gently; the goal is to sever roots as little as possible. Should you mangle several roots, don't despair; they will recover from the trauma. Now plant the individual seedlings, according to the spacing and light requirements indicated on the seed packet.

For thickly sown seedlings, just cut or pull clusters of plants apart for planting. Unwanted seedlings can be pinched off as they grow, to achieve desired spacing.



Adapted From: Kevin Lee Jacobs Photos by Liz Davey and GCN

Thank you for participating!

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