

# Winter Sowing

## Yes, You Can Garden in Winter!

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### What is Winter Sowing

**USDA:** A propagation method used throughout the winter where temperate climate seeds are sown into protective vented containers and placed outdoors to foster a naturally timed, high percentage germination of climate tolerant seedlings.

WinterSown.org; Facebook: Winter Sowers

### What to Winter Sow

**Germination info:** CMS; Cold Moist Stratification; Pre-chill; Refrigerate/freeze; Stratify; Self-sows; Sow in fall; Not for tropical plants

**Name indicates natural area:** Plains; Prairie; Desert; Mountain; Swamp; Field; River;  
Name indicates temperate origin: Siberian, Chinese, Polar, Alpine, Orientale, Canadensis, Russian

### Supplies

**Container:** Holds 3"-4" potting mix; Allows for drainage holes, condensation and top growth

**Tape:** Duct, packaging, painters; Scissors; Sharp implement: Can be scissors if pointed to make drainage holes; Drill, knife, etc

**Moist potting mix:** No water retaining additives; Not seed starting mix; Not soil; Fertilizer is ok

### Seeds

**Marker:** Paint pen, nail polish, grease pencil; Not Sharpies

**Other:** Plastic: Painter's tarp, shower curtain, food wrap; Label: To place inside containers; Paper tubes

**Containers:** Milk jugs; Juice/soda bottles; Salad greens; Juice/milk cartons, sideways; Ice cream tubs; Deli, dairy containers; Bakery containers; Plastic baggies; Clear storage tub: Cups, flowerpots; Kid's pool; Bag of potting mix; Foil pans/clear domed lids; MISC: coffee filters, newspapers on bottom to prevent grub damage, if needed

### Why Winter Sow?

Can be done in Jan, Feb – break up Winter doldrums; No indoor setup needed – no lights, shelves, trays, heat mats; Inexpensive, cost effective; Reduce, Reuse, Recycle; Foraging reduction; Weed seed reduction; No hardening off; Seeds won't be washed away, rot, dry out; Flexible – easy to vary to you; Diversity -

More variety than what you can find grown out; Hardy seedlings; Cold Moist Stratification – CMS, naturally!; Easy! Fun!; Loosie goosie; Laid back, casual

### When to Winter Sow

Winter Solstice, Dec 21 and beyond: Days begin to lengthen; temps are cooler

Start with Trees and shrubs; Perennials, Biennials; Cold-season vegetables  
Tender annuals, tender perennials, warm season veggies - Late Winter to Spring  
Warmer season veggies – mid to late Spring  
Seed info: How many days of cold temps? Weeks before last frost?

### **How and Where to Winter Sow**

Prep (rinse/wash) containers as you collect them; Gather seeds; Moisten potting mix – warm/hot water; Fill containers; Scatter seed; Seal; label; Place outside; Near water source; Out of the way of people & pets; Partial sun/shade; As season warms, keep eye out for drying and germinating.

**Label:** Paint marker on top, outside; Permanent marker: Duct tape on bottom, Plant tag inside;

**Vent:** Jugs, bottles - no caps; Bags, zip -seal, leave open with clothespin; Short containers without tops - Inside bags, use support to hold up vented bag; Plastic wrap, clear lids: Poke holes in wrap or lid

**Watering:** Self-watering, condensation; Spray/spritz through top hole; Set in a tray with water to absorb

**Container MISC:** Add mark to workspace for tape length; Seal options: Slip top inside bottom; Hole punch, bread twisty or pipecleaner; Slits in top/bottom; Drawbacks: Foraging mice, voles; Blow open; Condensation loss; Bottom water as needed; Open/close with temps, if desired; Not a mini-greenhouse but a protective container

**Seedling Management:** Divide into small clumps or Hunks of Seedlings – 2 sets of true leaves or larger and plant in ground; Pot up individually; Pull seeds before germinating, put under lights, gets going sooner

### **Failure is an option – so let's dig in!**

**Light:** Too much, Fried; Not enough, Didn't germinate

**Water:** Too much, Drown, rot; Too little: Dried up

**I forgot** about them until June: Set reminders on your calendar

**Spindly, flops:** Remove top or plant sooner

**Short, stumpy:** Not enough light, warmth; Move to sunnier spot

They were eaten! Slugs? Use coffee filter, newspaper in bottom under potting mix

Rabbits? Leave top on longer; Place out of reach, elevate

Try, try again!

### **Resources:**

WinterSown.org; Facebook: Winter Sowers

Illinois Ext: <https://extension.illinois.edu/news-releases/winter-seed-sowing>

Penn State Ext: <https://extension.psu.edu/starting-seeds-in-winter>

## Plant Highlights

### Brown-eyed Susan

- › *Rudbeckia triloba*
- › 30 days cold stratification
- › Med-wet to med-dry
- › Full-part sun
- › 3'
- › Aug – Oct
- › Bees, butterflies; LH

### Prairie/Yellow Coneflower

- › *Ratibida pinnata*
- › 30 days cold stratification
- › Medium to med-dry
- › Full-part sun
- › 5'
- › July – September
- › Bees, butterflies; LH

### Purple Prairie Clover

*Dalea purpurea*

0 days cold stratification

Inoculate

Scarify if hulled

Medium to dry

Full-part sun

2'

July – September

Bees, butterflies; LH

Mammal browse

### Swamp Milkweed

*Ratibida pinnata*

30 days cold stratification

Medium to med-dry

Full-part sun

5'

July – September

Bees, butterflies; LH

### Wild Nodding Onion

*Allium cernuum*

60 days CMS

Medium-wet to med-dry

Full-part sun

18"

July – August

Bees