



Native Plant Winter Seed Sowing

Winter seed sowing is an easy and inexpensive method of starting native seeds outside by making “green houses” out of clean plastic containers with lids. This no-fuss method allows you to plant seeds in your homemade greenhouses and then place them outdoors for the winter. Because most native seeds need to go through a process of seed stratification* to germinate, these plantings will germinate in the spring and grow into sturdy seedlings that can be transplanted when warm weather arrives.

Materials Needed:

- Clean plastic containers such as clamshell packaging, large yogurt or sour cream containers, plastic jugs (cut almost in half, creating a hinge), or disposable “Tupperware” type storage containers.
- Potting soil without added fertilizer, peat moss or growth enhancers. Soil from your own yard works fine, too.
- Nails and a hammer, scissors, sharp knife or a drill, etc., to punch air and drainage holes into the container.
- Weatherproof marker for plant identification.
- Native plant seeds** from your garden, a friend, or any reputable source (avoid most “wildflower” seed packets).

Planting:

- Clean out containers.
- Poke or drill drainage holes in container bottoms and lids (about 4-6 holes), for drainage and airflow.
- Fill containers to approximately three inch depth with soil and water thoroughly.
- Sprinkle seeds sparingly to avoid crowding when seedlings start to grow larger. Pat down for good seed-soil contact.
- Secure the lid. If using a hinged container, tape shut with weather proof tape. No need to keep caps on plastic jugs.
- Label your container with type of seed and date planted. Be sure to label in a way that can endure harsh winter weather.
- Place your newly planted container outside where it will be exposed to rain and snow. Don’t worry if it gets buried with snow. Do not place under an eave and keep in a place that is safe from wind and critters.

Transplanting:

- Check your containers when weather warms in your region. When plants begin to germinate and emerge from the soil, remove lids to prevent seedlings from overheating.
- As the seedlings grow, prevent soil from drying out. Water as needed, especially as weather warms.
- As weather warms, remove lids/open containers in order to keep seedlings from overheating and to begin to expose to them natural elements.
- Transplant into the garden in late spring or early summer when plants start to seem too big for the container. There is no need to thin seedlings.
- Continue to water as you would any newly planted vegetation.

Photo by Carmen Simonet



Some MN species that sow easily in winter containers:

Agastache spp. (Hyssop)
Asclepias spp. (Milkweed)
Dalea spp. (Prairie Clover)
Echinacea spp. (Coneflower)
Helianthus spp. (Sunflower)
Eutrochium spp. (Joe-pye Weed)
Liatris spp. (Blazing Star)
Lupinus perennis (Wild Lupine)
Monarda spp. (Bergamot)
Solidago spp. (Goldenrod)
Symphotrichum spp. (Aster)
Zizia spp. (Alexanders)
Most native grass spp.

* See this guide for **Seed Stratification**: <https://www.prairienursery.com/resources-guides/seed-stratification/>.

** Only collect seed from public or private property with permission. Only purchase seeds from vendors that offer regionally-sourced (within 200 miles) native seeds.