

gardening

Start your seeds outside, even in winter

If you're itching to do some seed starting, but lack the space or the bucks to set up a light stand and buy a lot of equipment, Monica Milla of Ann Arbor has the perfect solution — outdoor winter seed sowing. And she has written a great book detailing the entire process.

This passionate gardener got her start while surfing the Internet for information on growing from seed. She came upon the winter sowing forum on the Garden Web site, forums2.gardenweb.com/forums/wtrsw/, and she was hooked.

Winter seed sowing is not a new idea. Growers of alpine plants, whose seeds require a period of cold before they will germinate, have used this method of growing for eons. Once planted, the seed-filled containers are placed in cold frames to sit out the winter outside.

In place of a cold frame, Milla uses different kinds of covered containers, many of which are recycled from the kitchen — gallon milk jugs, cottage cheese



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Monica Milla

containers, juice and pop bottles, as well as plastic clam shells and foam coffee cups.

Milla's new book "Fun with Winter Seed Sowing" (Garden Faerie Press, \$15) is a quick-and-easy read that's well organized and illustrated with 19 photographs.

Winter seed sowing is an easy way to grow garden plants. It's fun, creative and best yet, cheap, says Milla. And it gives frustrated gardeners something to do during the gray days of winter. She notes that when the seedlings sprout in spring

Gardening writer Monica Milla says that when seeds are started outside, they are already acclimated to the environment so they can be planted as soon as they develop their first true set of leaves.

Below: "Fun with Winter Seed Sowing" tells how to get started.



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Milla's book gives easy-to-follow, step-by-step instructions that make the process

a snap. The hardest part may be picking out the plants you want to grow, because Milla provides an extensive plant list, which includes perennials, biennials, vegetables, fruits and herbs, all of which have been successfully grown by her or other Garden Web Forum participants.

This is a great way to get sweet peas, snap peas and other cold-weather plants started and not have to worry about timing or the weather.

You can order Milla's book "Fun with Winter Seed Sowing" from her Web site: www.thegardenfaerie.com or call (734) 975-6865.

Timely tip

■ Julia Dingle of Rochester winter sows her California poppies by tossing the seed out on the snow. Other self-sowing seeds such as nigella and larkspur can also be planted this way.

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