

Winter Seed Sowing Overview

What is Winter Sowing?

Winter sowing is a way to mimic Mother Nature and create hardy seedlings that can be transplanted as soon as they get their true leaves. Seeds are sown in mini greenhouses (with top and bottom ventilation) outdoors from late December to early March where they remain dormant until spring. Containers require little attention during the winter as watering occurs by rain and melting snow through slits in the containers (or is not needed when the soil is frozen). As the weather warms, seeds germinate at their natural times. We now monitor for moisture more closely, water more often, and open lids in daytime until the seedlings are transplanted.

Containers

- ☼ Must be able to hold at least 2 inches of moistened, settled soil mix
- ☼ Must be clear enough to see your hand through **OR** have clear tops
- ☼ Must have ventilation holes (1/4", 15/64", or 7/32" drill bit) in the top and bottom
- ☼ Flats with lids, milk jugs, yogurt containers, juice containers, etc.

Soil Mixes

Top soil and potting soil are too heavy. Seed starter mixes are too light and fluffy.

Soil mixes are just right! Many winter sowers prefer these mixes:

- ☼ **Not** moisture control, **not** weed suppressant
- ☼ Premier Pro-Mix for Potting and Seeding (moisten with warm water)
- ☼ Premier Pro-Mix Ultimate Organic Mix (moisten with warm water)
- ☼ Mix you own: 2 parts compost + 2 parts peat moss or coir + 1 part perlite (more recipes at <http://www.organicgardening.com/learn-and-grow/potting-soil-recipes>)

Winter Sowing Tips

- ☼ Use **soil mixes**, **not** cheap soil, potting soil, top soil, or seed starting soil
- ☼ Use pre-moistened soil mix
- ☼ Do not over- or under-water
- ☼ Remember to label containers
- ☼ Do not seed more than you can plant
- ☼ Keep seedlings ventilated by removing lids during day
- ☼ Keep seedlings in proper sun/shade conditions

Winter Sowing Resources

- ☼ Monica's website www.thegardenfaerie.com and blog gardenfaerie.blogspot.com
- ☼ GardenWeb Winter Sowing Forum: <http://forums2.gardenweb.com/forums/wtrsow/>
- ☼ FAQ: <http://faq.gardenweb.com/faq/wtrsow> and WS Info: www.wintersown.org



Winter-Sown Container Instructions

Caring for Sown Containers

- ☼ Set outside immediately after sowing:
 - On a porous surface
 - In an open, uncovered area so rain and snow fall on container
- ☼ Check weekly for moisture in the soil mix:
 - Soil should be moist (medium to dark brown), not dry (light brown)
 - If soil is dry, water as needed
 - If soil is too wet/moldy, add a few more holes in the container's bottom

Caring for the Seedlings

- ☼ Keep containers sealed until at least one seedling has sprouted
- ☼ Once you **both** have a seedling and daytime temperatures consistently reach highs of at least 50° F, ventilate the container during the daytime:
 - Prop up lids of containers initially and then remove entirely over time
 - Remove tape from jugs and let the top half of the jug open naturally, over time gradually bending back the top of the jug farther to let more air in
 - Replace lids or put jug tops back down at night (no need to re-tape)
- ☼ Once you **both** have opened the top every day for a week and nighttime temperatures are above 40° F, you can keep the top off both day and night:
 - You can cut the top off completely, but save it in case of frost
 - *Always replace tops if there's a frost advisory or if overnight lows below 35° F are predicted*
- ☼ Check daily for soil moisture (it dries out more quickly with the top open) and water accordingly
- ☼ Make sure your container is in the right conditions for the seedling (sun, shade, etc.)

Planting the Seedlings

- ☼ Seedlings can be planted as soon as they have their first set of true leaves
- ☼ If using peat or newspaper pots, plant the pot in the ground so as not to disturb the roots
- ☼ Plant seedlings in their desired conditions (appropriate light and moisture levels)