

## Winter Sowing Basics

Winter sowing is a method for starting seeds that utilizes cold moist conditions to naturally break down the outer shell of a seed and enable germination once temperatures warm enough to break dormancy.

By placing seed starting medium and seeds in a translucent container with drain holes a greenhouse effect can be created. This is a great solution for starting seeds if space and light are limited for indoor seed starting.

### Supplies needed:

- **Translucent** gallon water or milk jug. You must be able to see into the jug from the sides and top. We recommend you use one jug per type of seed.
- Sterile potting/container or seed starter **soilless** medium (Do not use moisture control potting mix)
- Seeds
- **Waterproof** marker for labeling
- Plant markers
- **Waterproof** tape such as a 3M duct tape
- Water mister or sprayer
- A tool to cut plastic and to make drain holes. This can be a utility knife, scissors, screwdriver.

### Steps:

1. Choose seeds to grow - As a beginner, reliable seeds to choose are seeds that require cold stratification like many perennials and native wild flowers, annual flower seeds that are known self seeders and or tolerant of cooler conditions, vegetables and herbs that are frost and cold tolerant or early germinators. Note - other types of seeds can certainly be successful with the winter sowing technique but the before mentioned are proven performers.
2. Wash and rinse out jug, remove cap. Optional - remove any labels. If there are large labels on both sides it's a good idea to remove them because they will block the light from the seedlings.
3. Use a pen to mark about 8 drain holes on the bottom of the jug and 4 - 5 marks for holes on top part of jug.
4. Cut out holes using your tool of choice or a quick method is to get a screw driver good and hot on the stove and melt in the hole openings (be careful!). Poking with a utility knife and giving it a twist to enlarge the hole is another method.
5. Take a pen and mark a cutting line all around the jug just under the handle. Leave about 2" under handle that will not be cut and will be a hinge for opening the jug after germination.
6. Use the utility knife to start the cut line around the jug and either finish with the knife or use scissors. Remember to leave about 2" uncut area for an opening hinge.
7. If the soilless medium is not damp, pre-moisten it prior to placing it in the jug. Slightly dampen it with water and work it in with your hands until it is evenly moist.
8. Place the soilless medium in the bottom half of the jug about 3-4" deep.
9. Place seeds in the soil approximately as deep as the seed is wide and **lightly cover** with the soilless medium. Or not cover at all if really tiny just press into the medium. Pay close attention to the germination requirements for the seeds. Some seeds require light to germinate. So lightly press those seeds in the soil. Be careful to space the seeds about 1-2" apart or be prepared to thin out. **Remember the seeds will become plants that have to thrive in that jug until conditions can allow to transplant them.**
10. Take a water sprayer and mist the planted seeds.
11. Label with plant marker and permanent ink pen. Some winter sowers have reported fading markings of the plant type when done on the outside of the jug.
12. Close up the jug and use 3m clear tape or duct tape to seal the opening. Do not put the lid back on the jug!
13. Set jugs outside in an area exposed to full sun, in a fairly protected area from strong winds and away from any obstacles or roof overhangs that will prevent water and snow from getting in. Again, pay attention to the growing instructions. Some seeds may require a shady area.
14. Wait.
15. At the first sign of spring with freezing temps still in the evenings, the seedlings should start to emerge. Open the tops and check for water. If dry, water gently, not disturbing the seedlings but giving sufficient water. Then close tops.
16. As sunny and warmer days start, open the lids of the jugs for a few hours each day but close up again for the cooler evenings. Continue to check for dryness and water as needed. Your plants should be strong enough by transplant time if they get the sun, evening protection, water and are not overcrowding each other.