

# Winter Sowing of Seeds

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# What You Will Learn

- By the end of this presentation, you will be able to:
  - Understand the process of winter sowing
  - Create a mini-greenhouse from a recycled container
  - Start growing plants from seed with little cost, no grow lights, and little after care



## **What is Winter Sowing?**

# Winter Sowing Is...

- Cost effective method for growing many plants
- A technique to control germination location and conditions
- A method to start seedlings that can be left unattended for weeks at a time
- An excellent way for gardeners to battle cabin fever in the winter months

# How Does it Work?



- Use a plastic container to create a mini-greenhouse to protect plants from cold temperatures while creating an ideal place to grow seedlings
- Works best for seeds that are cold tolerant or require a period of cold to grow

# Why Does It Work?

- Seeds get exposed to the cold some need to germinate (Stratification)
- Freezing and thawing helps break down tough seed coats (Scarification)
- Seeds germinate when temperature and daylight are optimal



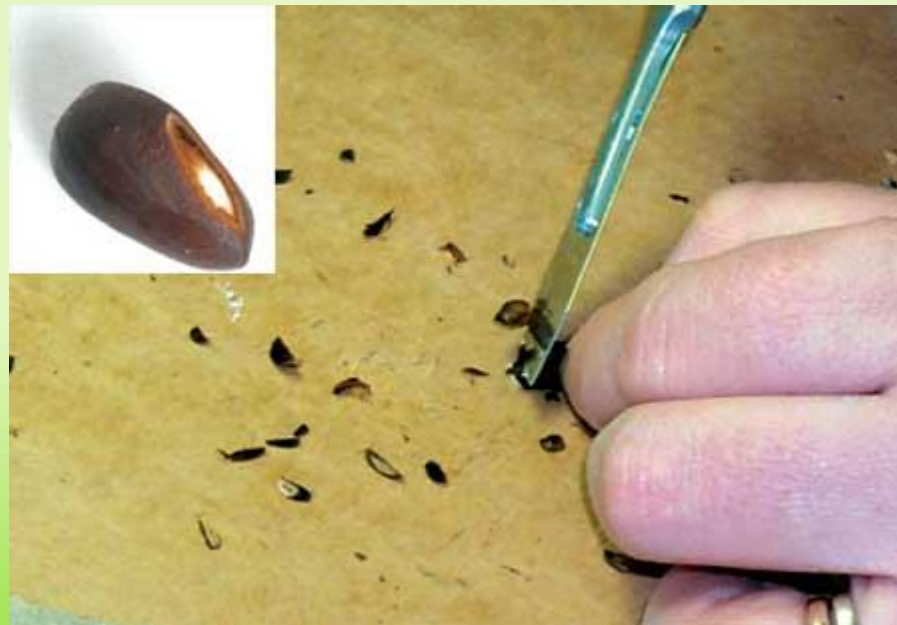
# Advantages

- Seeds are grown without taking space in your house
- No grow lights
- Protected environment versus direct sowing
- Can leave unattended for weeks
- Control location of germination; don't mistake for weeds



# Advantages

- No damping off disease
- No need to harden off transplants
- Stratification and scarification are done by nature

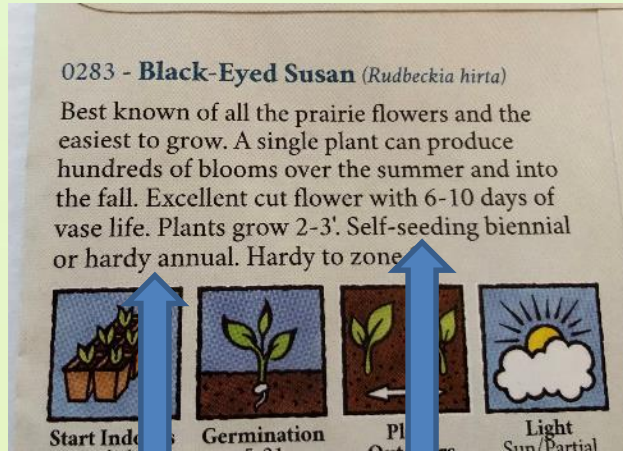




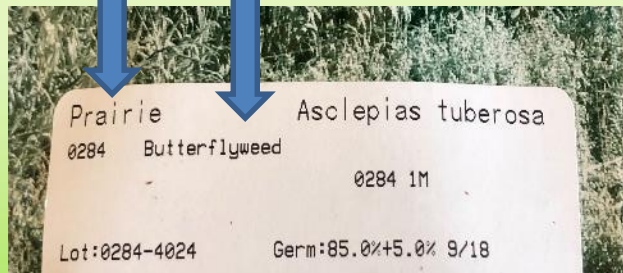


# How to Winter Sow

# Choose The Right Seeds



- Check seed packet for words like:
  - Hardy seeds
  - Self-sows
  - Needs pre-chilling
  - Can be sown in the fall
  - Can be direct sown early
  - Seedlings can withstand frost
  - Wildflower, Prairie flower
  - Weed (milkweed, butterfly weed)



# Collect Containers

- Recycled clear containers like
  - Milk or water jugs
  - 2 liter soda bottles
  - Plastic salad greens containers
  - Juice bottles



# Clean Containers

- Discard lids for milk jugs and soda bottles
- Wash containers
  - Hot, soapy water
- Rinse well
- Drain



# Prepare Mini- Greenhouse



- For jugs and bottles, cut a slit halfway up the container.
- From slit, cut the top from the bottom horizontally leaving a 1-2 inch hinge
- Poke drainage holes in the bottom of the container



# Prepare Mini-Greenhouse

- For containers with lids, cut several small holes in top for watering (rain)
- Poke drainage holes in the bottom of the container



# Label Container

- Write the name of the seed
  - On the container with a Sharpie
  - On a piece of duct tape stuck to the container
  - On a popsicle stick or vertical blind inside the container
- Labels fade so marking the inside and outside is helpful



# Add Soil to Container

- Use potting mix
  - Light and fluffy
  - Free from contamination
  - Fertilizer not required
  - Do not use garden soil
- Premoisten soil
- Put in 3-4 inches of soil





# Sow Seeds in Container



- Sprinkle seeds on soil
- Tamp them down for good seed to soil contact
- Most seeds do not require covering

# Water and Seal Container

- Water container to make sure soil is moist
- Use duck tape to close flap
- Make sure container is labelled



# Place Container Outside

- Sunny location
- Not under an overhang so it gets rain
- Protect it from wind and animals



# Wait for the Green to Show



# Open Container Up



- When the weather starts to warm, open the container up a bit
- When first true leaves appear, open container more
- Eventually remove the tape to “harden off” the plants

# Transplant to Garden

- Based on the directions on the seed packet, transplant seedlings into garden
- Break or cut apart plants growing together



# Things to Consider

- Critters
- Temperature Changes
- Dry Spells
- Drainage



# Winter Sowing Native Plants





# Why Winter Sow Natives?

- Works particularly well for native plants
- Natives support pollinators, wildlife, and healthy ecosystems



# How Did Natives Evolve?

- Native plants evolved with & naturally support pollinators, providing food & shelter



# Why are Natives Important?

- Native plants are crucial for pollinators & beneficial insects which help to give us healthy fruits & vegetables



# Natives and the Ecosystem

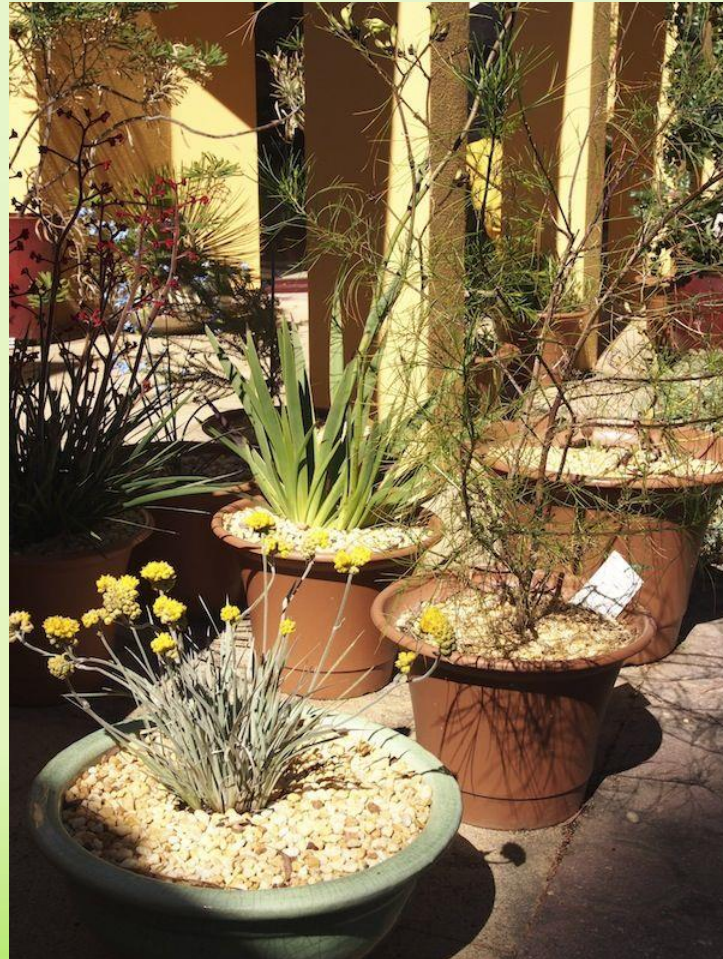


- Native plants are beautiful and support a healthy ecosystem



# Growth Pattern of Natives

- Grow slowly & may not bloom first year
- Can tend in pots in summer & plant in fall



# Hands On Demonstration



# Become a Master Gardener



- **Grow your gardening knowledge**
- **Help the environment**
- **Make new friends**
- **Give back to the community**



# Need more information?

## Home and Garden Information Center

<http://extension.umd.edu/hgic>

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