Winter Sowing of Seeds

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What You Will Learn

• By the end of this presentation, you will be able to:
  o Understand the process of winter sowing
  o Create a mini-greenhouse from a recycled container
  o 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:
  o Hardy seeds
  o Self-sows
  o Needs pre-chilling
  o Can be sown in the fall
  o Can be direct sown early
  o Seedlings can withstand frost
  o Wildflower, Prairie flower
  o 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
  o On the container with a Sharpie
  o On a piece of duct tape stuck to the container
  o 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
  o Light and fluffy
  o Free from contamination
  o Fertilizer not required
  o 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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This program was brought to you by UME Master Gardener Program of Washington County.

We grow gardeners!