



Outdoor Winter Seed Sowing

Many native seeds need to have a winter period of cold moist temperatures to break dormancy and germinate (stratification). Not all native seeds require this cold period for germination, but every seed can be sown outdoors in the fall or winter. Below are the six easy steps to do it.

Step 1 - The ingredients: Seeds, 4" plastic pots (See PSU link for using milk jugs), PENCIL (even waterproof pens wash off), labels, organic compost-based potting soil, SAND (coarse all-purpose), and hardware cloth with ¼ to ½ inch mesh to use as a rodent screen.

Step 2 - Prepare the pots: Fill pots and pack the soil to create a flat surface ¼ to ½ inch from the top. Label the pot with the name and sowing date and press label down deep along the edge of the pot.

Step 3 - Sow the seeds: Seeds can be sown thickly (1/8 to 1/4 inch apart). Spread them evenly throughout the pot on the surface of the soil. Cover the seeds with sand. A general rule of thumb is to cover to the depth of the thickness of the seed. For example, a sesame seed is covered with 1/8 inch of sand; a pea is covered with ½ inch of sand. Seeds that need light to germinate should just be pressed firmly into the soil. Water the pots gently but thoroughly—do not flood them as the seeds may float to the surface or wash out of the pot.

Step 4 - Place pots in a shady location out of doors: Make sure the pots are level and covered with a weighted rodent screen. Under a garden bench or table, or on the north side of the house beyond the roof drip line works well. Note: Some sources say to plant in sun. The key is to check moisture and to keep out of the wind.

Step 5 - Wait for germination and seedling care: Start checking in late March for germination. Each native seed has its own timetable for germination—from early spring to late summer. By late March, you will need to begin watering every couple of days, depending upon the weather. In May or June, some species can be moved to bigger pots while other species will be growing very slowly or may just have germinated. These can stay in the same pots. Sun-loving species should be moved to a partially sunny location to grow. Keep watered.

Step 6 - Plant in your garden: Seedlings can grow all summer in pots and can be transplanted in the Fall. This is the easiest way to not forget to water them. If you do plant earlier, be sure to water. Most natives are perennials and do not bloom in the first summer, but many will bloom in the second summer. Shrubs and slow-growing woodland wildflowers may take longer.

For more information:

<https://wildseedproject.net/2016/11/ideal-time-for-sowing-native-seeds/>

<https://extension.umd.edu/sites/extension.umd.edu/files/2021-12/All%20the%20Dirt%20on%20Winter%20Sowing%20Power%20Point.pdf>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_T7j8VG7J1shttps://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Suui7AJnSs

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