

Winter Seed Sowing – A Great Remedy for Seasonal Blues



January, known for being cold and dark, is right around the corner. Winter sowing of native seeds in containers set outside, is a great remedy for those winter blues and can begin as early as the winter solstice.

Winter sowing is an inexpensive way to add a diversity of native plants to our yards. This method protects the seeds from birds, animals and erosion giving the seeds a greater chance of survival and increasing our yield of perennials beneficial to pollinators and wildlife.

Most Connecticut native seeds need a period of cold moist stratification to germinate. That is, they need to be subjected to the freezing and thawing that happens throughout winter to break their dormancy. For many of these seeds one winter will do the trick to get them on their way to germination.

Follow these basic instructions for successful winter sowing:

1. Use a clean 1-gallon jug. Other types of containers will work but the 1-gallon jug is our preferred container.
2. Make some drainage holes in the bottom of the jug.
3. Slice the jug in half leaving the handle attached and a 4" depth in the bottom half.
4. Pack 3-4" of wet soil in the bottom of the jug. Avoid soil for vegetables, our native seeds don't like soil with added fertilizers and water retention agents.
5. Native seedlings grow well close together so don't be afraid to sow about 1/8"-1/4" apart. We recommend growing one species type per jug.
6. Cover lightly with about an 1/8" soil. Be aware, there are some seed types that need light to germinate so should be left uncovered.
7. Label the container with the species name using a weatherproof marker. Additionally, write the information on a popsicle stick or the discarded jug cap and place inside the jug.
8. Fasten the jug back together by making a hole above and below the slice and securing with a twist tie.
9. Set the jug outside in a spot that only gets morning sun and is exposed to rain and snow.
10. If the soil dries out spray with water or water from the bottom of the jug.

Each native species has its own germination timetable; your seeds will need anywhere from 30-90 days of winter weather to begin their germination journey. If you don't see seedlings sprouting in early spring don't be discouraged, some species might not appear until late spring through August.

When you see signs of life open the jug and move those species that like sunny conditions to a location that gets more sunshine. During this period, you need to be vigilant with moisture control and overheating. Young seedlings can dry out quickly and die. Additionally, as we transition from winter to spring close your jugs when the overnight temperatures descend into the frost range.

When your seedlings have two sets of true leaves they can be bumped up to pots to continue growing. Alternatively, they can be planted directly in the garden but do pamper them. Even though native plants are hardy they are still susceptible at this stage.

Here are some resources for reputable seed suppliers for this region:

<https://www.northeastseedcollective.com/>

<https://www.wildseedproject.net/>

<https://www.tinymeadowfarm.com/>

We will be hosting a winter seed sowing event at the Newtown senior center, Friday January 16th at 2pm. This is a free event for members and \$5 for non-members. Registration is required. We will provide soil, seeds and will have a limited supply of jugs so please bring 1-2 jugs to contribute to the event. For more information, and to register, please contact the senior center at (203)270-4310.