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MAKING MORE BLUEBELLS



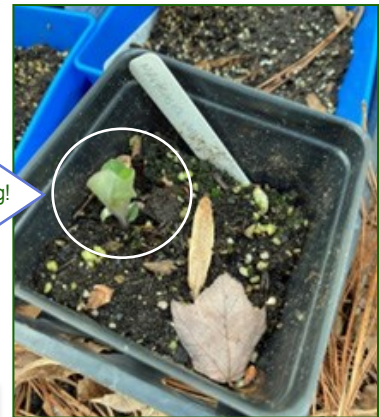
Who doesn't love seeing Virginia Bluebells (*Mertensia virginica*) for the few short weeks they flower each spring? I am a big fan. I even collect seed from my plants in hopes of propagating more. Sadly, I haven't had much success.

This spring, though, I had a baby plant sprout in a pot I had seeded in December 2020. That means the seed was nearly *two years old* when it germinated! This sent me into research-mode to figure out what was going on.

I learned a couple of important bits of information. First, if you collect the

seed when it ripens, but you let it dry out, the seed may develop double dormancy and take two years to sprout. If, instead, you plant the seed right away, it should sprout.

The second important bit of information about the seeds is that they are highly prized by ants! The seeds have a fatty substance on them, called an eliasome, that is food for ants. Ants scout the plants and drag seeds back to their nests. They feed the eliasome to their larvae and discard the seed near the nest. The ant activity helps the plants spread and grow away from their parent plants.



This fact made me realize *I am in competition with ants* to collect my treasured seed! Out I scooted to my garden and captured old flower heads in little gauze bags.

Checking on the plants today, I saw my tiny challenger assessing the situation. I guess I better get busy and plant those precious seeds!