Winter Sowing For Spring Flowers

Getting a Jump on Planting Seeds!

What is Winter Sowing?

- Provides natural STRATIFICATION for seeds that need a period of wet and cold to germinate
- Creates protective mini-greenhouses out of recycled containers
- Allows seeds to germinate naturally outdoors – Let nature do the work
- Produces sturdy seedlings that are acclimated and ready to go in the garden in early spring

Top 5 reasons to Winter Sow

5. You want to grow certain flowers, but they need a period of cold
4. You can't sow seeds directly in the garden as it is too cold and frozen
3. You want to save money on buying plants
2. You have limited space available for starting seeds

Reason #1

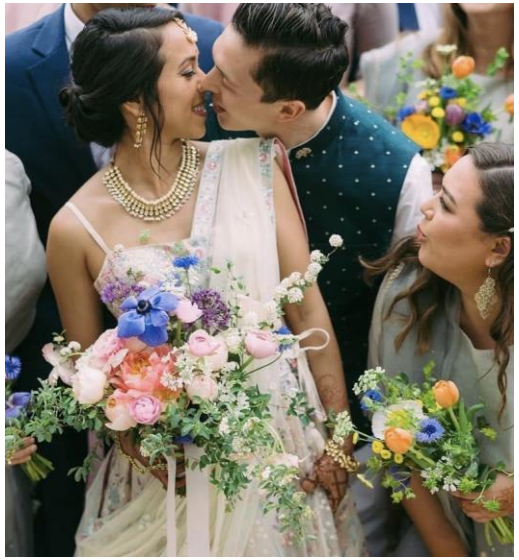
You want to get an early start on growing flowers!

(because May/June is wedding time)

What seeds benefit from Winter Sowing?

Hardy Annuals

Love in the mist (Nigella damascena), larkspur (Delphinium consolida), orlaya (Orlaya grandiflora), Chinese forget me not (Firmament cynoglossum), bachelor buttons (Centaurea), corn cockle (Agrostemma), sweet peas, and poppies (Papaver somniferum)….



What seeds benefit from Winter Sowing?

Biennials

hollyhock (Alcea rosea), foxgloves (Digitalis), sweet william (Dianthus barbatus), canterbury bells (Campanula medium), brown-eyed susan (Rudbeckia triloba)…

What seeds benefit from Winter Sowing?

Perennials

lupines (Lupinus), yarrow (Achillea millefolium), feverfew (Tanacetum parthenium), cone flowers (Echinacea), salvia (Salvia pratensis), baby's breath (Gypsophila paniculata), blue star (Amsonia tabernaemontana)

How to Create Your Mini Greenhouse?

Step One – Obtain and prepare containers

- Collect clear or translucent plastic jugs or containers of all sorts
- Thoroughly clean jugs with bleach or disinfectant
- Insert 4 - 6 slits on the bottom of the jugs for drainage
- Cut each jug around the middle, leaving a hinge so it can open and close
- Remove the cap to allow heat to escape and allow rain and air to get in

Step Two – Half fill with potting mix

- Use good potting mix or potting soil made for outdoor containers
- The soil can be with or without fertilizer
- Soil should hold moisture and have good drainage
- Premix with water so it is evenly moist (not sopping wet)
- You need about 4” of potting mix in each container
- Gently tamp down the potting mix

Step Three – Plant seeds and label the container

- Select seeds appropriate for winter sowing
- Check to see if the seeds ‘need light’ or ‘need darkness’
- Put seeds on the soil and cover with soil
- Spray mist the soil with water
- Label the container – Use a “Garden Marker”

Step Four – Close the jug and put outside

- Use a good duct tape for sealing the jug closed
- Place the jug outside, where ever you have space
- Be sure the jug is exposed to sunlight, rain, and/or snow
- Find a safe place that is protected from wind, dogs, cars, kids, etc.

Step Five – Check your seeds

- Be patient and trust the natural process…Every seed will germinate on its own timeline
- Monitor soil moisture weekly. If the soil appears dry, sprinkle with water in the opening
- On warm days (over 60-70 degrees), open the container
- Close the container for night time and cold spells
- Once seedlings get around 2” tall and grow “true” leaves, leave the container open

Step Six – Transplant the seedlings

- Once the soil in your outside gardens can be “worked,” it is time to give the seedlings space to grow
- Identify the best location for your seeds and the light needed: full sun, part sun, shade….?
- Prepare the garden bed with good soil and compost
- Gently pull out the seed clump and tease apart each seedling
- Plant each seedling about 3-6” apart (depending on the variety) and tamp down the soil around the roots
- Water the seedlings immediately

Sources for More Information

- Google “Winter Sowing” for hundreds of links
- Join Facebook Groups:
  “Winter Sowers” or “Winter Sowing – Beginners”
- Joe Lampl – joegardener.com
  Podcast – Winter Sowing: A simple way to Start Seeds Outdoors
- Lori Hernadez – Three Acre Farm
  Blogs on how to grow hardy annuals and winter sowing
- Lisa Mason Ziegler - Gardener’s Workshop
  Cool Flowers: How to Grow and Enjoy Long-Blooming Hardy Annual Flowers Using Cool Weather Techniques

Corn Cockle (*Agrostemma*) performs best when winter sown.

Our Plan for Today

- Move to a table with 4 people
- Use your knife or scissors to make slits in bottom and then cut the container in half with a hinge
- Add pre-moistioned soil to your container
- Sow around 5 -7 cold hardy annual seeds from the seed packets:

nigella

bupleurum

agrostemma

- Use duct tape to seal your container (we will put a strip on your chair)
- Write the name of the seed on the outside of your container

Any Questions?

For more information on Winter Sowing

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