



# Growing Guru



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## WINTER SOW IN GALLON JUGS

Planting seeds in winter is an obvious choice for seeds of northern native plants that require cold, moist stratification to germinate. But it turns out that using translucent gallon jugs or other protected containers with drainage holes also works for herbs, vegetables, annual flowers, and especially perennial flowers. In fact, that is how the process known as "winter sow" came to be developed by Trudi Greissle Davidoff of New York in 2000. She had collected a lot of seeds for her garden but had no greenhouse and little indoor space to give the seeds what they needed for early germination. Now the amount of information on the internet is overwhelming and perhaps even contradictory, but that just means there are no hard and fast rules for practicing winter sowing.

### KEY STEPS FOR SUCCESS

- Collect, wash/rinse, & dry translucent or transparent containers, especially jugs
- Make drainage holes in bottom and lower sides with drill, Phillips screwdriver, soldering iron, glue gun, or utility knife
- Cut jug with utility knife or utility scissors ~4 inches from bottom, leaving part attached for hinge (some suggest only 3 sides and opposite the handle)
- Use new potting mix that is well moistened to fill bottom of jug. Put in a coffee filter first if lots of slugs in your area. Press down.
- On outside label seed type planted with UV resistant Garden Marker, China marker, or paint marker (not Sharpie); lower part best
- On inside also label seed type planted, using appropriate makers on plastic knife or strip cut from plastic dairy container or pencil on strips of window blinds also does not fade
- Plant seeds (most pressed into surface) & gently add more water
- Seal container with tape (cheap duct, poly, tuck tapes are best) to keep moisture in and critters out
- Place jugs without caps outside where rain & snow can enter (on or off ground); then wait.
- Check moisture regularly; should show condensation & feel heavy; add water gently
- Sunlight most important in spring, but not on hot days (avoid cooking seedlings)
- Watch for sprouting, keep moist, open jugs when days/nights are warm
- Transplant seedlings that have at least 2 sets of true leaves (OK to plant chunks)



The advantages of using gallon jugs are that they are readily available, are easily planted and maintained, can protect the seeds from birds, rodents, and wind, help maintain moisture, reduce competition from weeds, and will promote the growth of healthy and hardy seedlings with strong root systems.

Recommended videos include University of MD Master Gardener's [All the Dirt on Winter Sowing Native Plants](#) and Dolly Foster's [Winter Sowing](#) with a link to 7 handouts (instructions, plant lists) developed by Trudi's group WinterSown.

[Growit Buildit-YouTube Channel](#) and [associated website](#) provides over 120 gardening videos and lots of gardening information, much related to winter sowing & growing native plants.

See the Facebook group [Winter Sowers](#) with >139,000 members for resources, guides, photographs, ideas, and abundant feedback and suggestions.