



WINTER SOWING

What is winter sowing a/k/a Milk Jug Sowing?

Winter sowing is an easy and low cost technique for starting seeds that uses the outdoors and cold winter weather to get a jump start on spring planting. It creates strong hardy plants without taking up any indoor space.

You are making a mini greenhouse using recycled containers, soil, seeds and then letting mother nature do the rest of the work. They receive water from the weather, light from the sun and the seeds will sprout once the temperatures tell them it's time to start growing.

SUPPLIES:

Containers: Clean milk jugs, large juice/water containers (salad, cookie containers) Need to be deep enough for soil to be approximately 2 1/2- 3" deep.

Soil: Potting soil/mix (provides better nutrients) not seed starting soil

Tools: Box cutter or scissors to cut open container and make holes (can also use drill, soldering iron, hot glue gun for holes)

Duct Tape: High quality to adhere to the container the whole season

Marker: A Garden Marker or wax pencil to write plant identification on the duct tape, Sharpies tend to fade

Labels: For additional plant identification inside the container

Seeds: Perennials, frost-hardy annuals and vegetables

Vermiculite (optional): Helps improve moisture retention

STEP BY STEP INSTRUCTIONS:

Start by cutting drainage holes in the bottom of the container.

- Cut the container horizontally almost in half, leaving about 1"-1.5" uncut, still connecting the top to the bottom, creating a hinge. In a milk jug, this is usually by the handle.
- Moisten the soil with water just enough to form a ball.
- Fill the bottom half of the container with 2.5"-3" pre-moistened/damp potting soil.
- Place a label with the plant name inside the container.
- Follow seed package directions on planting the seeds. Seeds can be placed on top of the soil or a certain depth into the soil.
- Lightly mist the soil surface.
- (Optional) Sprinkle a light layer of vermiculate across the soil surface.
- Write the name of the plant on duct tape (this can be done before or after wrapping the container with the duct tape.) You can note how many seeds were planted.
- Close the container (cap should be removed) and place the duct tape around the horizontal cut so that the top and bottom are completely closed.

- Place outside in a sunny location where they'll get snow and rain but won't blow away (like near a house foundation).
- Check on the container regularly for condensation or assess the container's weight (heavier means wetter) to make sure there is enough moisture inside, add water if needed with a gentle spray.

Your plants are ready to transplant in the garden when:

- You see at least 2 sets of true leaves. (There are a lot of variants depending on plant type).
- There is no longer a risk of frost (early to mid-May).

Harden off your seedlings:

Open the containers a few days before you're ready to transplant them into your garden, the plants will need a few days to adjust to full element exposure.

- Day 1: Open container for just a few hours and place in the shade. Close lid back on container for the 1st night (no need to re-tape).
 - Day 2: Open container and leave in the sun for a few hours but monitor to catch any wilting. Using best judgement, close container again or leave open overnight.
 - Day 3+: Continue Day 2 routine extending sun exposure until plants look like they are fully hardened off.
 - Monitor daytime and nighttime temperatures for any dramatic change and protect plants if needed by closing containers again.
 - Keep in mind that the soil can dry out quickly once container is opened.
- Plant your seedlings once they are hardened off. Refer to seed packet for best location (full sun/ partial sun/shade).

You can find more information on Winter Sowing online through Google and helpful videos on YouTube.

Some of our favorite YouTube accounts (search their channels using 'Winter Sowing'):

Hooked and Rooted (a local Massachusetts gardener) and Garden Answer

Weymouth falls primarily within USDA Plant Hardiness Zone 6b, with some areas potentially touching Zone 7a, meaning the lowest winter temperatures average between -5°F to 5°F, allowing for a wide variety of cold-hardy plants to thrive, though coastal influence might push some spots to warmer 7a.

Presented by The Weymouth Garden Club For more information on The Weymouth Garden Club, visit www.weymouthgardenclub.com or scan our QR code:

