

Burlington Community Gardens

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How to Start Outdoor Winter Seed Sowing

Ever thought of starting seeds for your vegetable garden outside during the winter? It is possible, and can be successful to get your spring garden on a fast track for an early spring harvest.



Seeds are sown in miniature greenhouses made from recycled plastic containers, and then put outside in the snow and freezing cold. Once the weather starts to warm in the spring, the seeds will germinate at their own pace along with the shift in temperatures. Since the winter sown containers go outside, they don't take up space in the house. Winter sown seedlings are hardier, more robust, and with a

higher survival rate than seeds sown indoors.

Supplies to get started:

- Winter sowing containers
- Scissors
- Drill or old metal knife
- Potting soil
- Seeds (a list of varieties is included below)
- Duct tape
- Plant tags
- Pencil or permanent marker



Step 1: Choose your winter sowing containers – The shape and size of the container doesn't matter, but it must be made of transparent plastic, be deep enough to allow for soil in the bottom, and tall enough to allow space for the seedlings to grow.

Step 2: Prepare the winter sowing containers – Clean the containers. If you're using a tall narrow container you'll need to cut the container in half. Next, poke holes in the top and bottom of the container. Tip: Heat a knife to melt the holes to make the task easier (use an old knife because it will turn black over time and have plastic residue on it). Alternatively carefully use a drill or something sharp to poke the holes. Poke enough drainage holes in the bottom of the container to allow the

water to drain out so the seeds won't drown. Add the same amount of holes in the top of the container or leave the caps off rather than poking holes. The holes in the top are there to vent the containers so they won't overheat, and to allow rain and moisture to enter the containers.

Step 3: Add soil to the winter sowing container – Always use fresh, sterile potting soil when starting seeds. Never use soil from your garden in any of your containers.

Step 4: Plant the seeds – The best types of seeds to use for winter sowing are cold hardy annuals, herbs and cold crop vegetables, or plants that are perennial in your zone. A seed list follows these steps.

Step 5: Label your winter sowing containers – Don't trust your memory. Write on masking or duct tape, or directly on the top of the container with a permanent marker.

Step 6: Water the seeds – After planting seeds according to the seed packet instructions, water the potting soil thoroughly, and allow the containers to drain before moving them outside. Make sure the soil is evenly moist. Tip: Save some seeds for direct sowing in the garden in the early spring and late summer for succession crops.

Step 7: Put the lids on the containers – The lid should snap on and fit tight, use duct tape if you had to cut a container in half or to secure a lid tight.

Step 8: Put the winter sown containers outside – Move the containers outside to a spot where they are protected from heavy wind, but will get moisture and full sun out of the reach of pets, kids and other critters.

Step 9: Forget about them until spring – It's OK if they're completely covered by snow for a few months.

Step 10: Yea! Spring has arrived – Once the weather starts to warm up in the spring, check your



winter sown containers regularly for any signs of seedlings. Hardy plants will start to germinate first such as cold crop vegetables like broccoli, lettuce, spinach and spring blooming perennials. Make sure the winter sown containers don't overheat, and that the soil doesn't dry out. They become like mini greenhouses which can get pretty hot inside in the sun, so remember to vent them. Once the seedlings get tall enough where they are touching the top of the inside of the container, it's time to remove the lids. Winter sown seedlings can dry out pretty quickly once you take the lids off, so check them at least once a

day and water if necessary. Once the lids are off, keep an eye on the weather reports. If there is a chance for freezing temperatures, cover the containers with a sheet or blanket overnight.

Seeds Suitable for Winter Sowing



Some types of seeds work great, but others will only rot. It's important to know what to look for to help figure out what seeds to winter sow. Generally speaking, perennial seeds, cold crop vegetables and herbs, and cold hardy annuals are the best seeds for winter sowing.

Some warm weather vegetables, like certain varieties of peppers and tomatoes, could work with the winter sowing method too if you are not in too cold a climate zone, generally however warm weather veggies might not do very well.

Look for keywords on the seed packet when choosing the best seeds for winter sowing such as: self sowing, direct sow outside in the fall, direct sow outside in early spring", cold stratification, cold hardy, native perennial.

Arugula	Beets	Broccoli	Brussels sprouts	Cabbage
Carrot	Cauliflower	Chives (onion or garlic)	Cilantro	Collard greens
Dill	Endive	Kale	Kohlrabi	Lavender
Leeks	Lettuce	Mache	Mustard	Oregano
Pac-choy	Parsley	Peppermint	Radicchio	Radish
Rutabaga	Sage	Salsify	Spinach	Summer Savory
Swiss chard	Turnip			

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