

**New Hampton Garden Club  
Horticulture Report  
December 2017**

As we get ourselves and our gardens buttoned up for winter, I wanted to share with you a technique for starting seeds painlessly in the dark of winter with no special equipment! This is **winter sowing**.

Winter sowing works even here in New Hampshire because it's based on plants that self-sow in our area anyway. Those seeds often require a freeze and thaw cycle to break down the seed coat. No need to nick seeds in winter sowing! You will be letting nature decide when to germinate the seeds. You are just providing a little help in the form of a mini greenhouse to assure the highest rate of germination and ease of planting in the place of your choosing in the spring. For more tender annuals, you will be relying on the greenhouse nature of the technique to warm soil a little faster and hold heat a little better. Winter sown plants are strong and stocky and naturally hardened off.

Let's get started! Take a clean gallon or quart plastic jug and put holes in the bottom for drainage. You can use a Phillips head screwdriver heated on the stove to melt holes in the plastic or a drill. Then cut the jug almost all the way around about 4 inches up. Leave about 1 inch of the top attached to the bottom of the jug to form a hinge.

Label the jug with the name of the plants you'll be planting in it. Label on the bottom of the jug or on tape to keep the lettering out of the sun so it doesn't fade away.

Put 3 inches of potting soil in the bottom of the container. Water the soil well and allow it to drain. Add seeds. For fine seeds like alyssum or thyme, spread thinly as evenly as you can. For medium sized seeds like columbine or hollyhock use 6-8 per gallon jug. For large seeds like morning glory, sweet pea or lupine, use 4-6 per gallon container.

Flip the top back over and secure with a piece of duct tape or other tape that can be in freezing conditions without letting go.

Put your containers out in the yard in a spot open to sun, snow and rain. If you're concerned about your containers being tampered with by dogs, they can be put on a table or stump. It's fine if they're snow covered. This provides all the moisture needed. When Mother Nature decides the conditions are right, probably in spring, the seeds will germinate. Check periodically to see if they seem dry and water if necessary. Plant in the ground at the appropriate time for the plant as if you were planting material from the nursery.

Timing is everything so I'll give you a list of plants to put out in January or February, some for March, and some for April. These are for our Zone 5 area.

**Seeds for January, February winter sowing:**

<i>Columbine</i>	<i>Thyme</i>	<i>Baptisia</i>
<i>Lupine</i>	<i>Broccoli</i>	<i>Coneflower</i>
<i>Hollyhocks</i>	<i>Sage</i>	<i>Lavender</i>
<i>Bachelor Button</i>	<i>Oregano</i>	
<i>Nicotiana</i>	<i>Cilantro</i>	

**Seeds for March winter sowing:**

<i>Impatiens</i>	<i>Lettuce</i>	<i>Alyssum</i>
<i>Cosmos</i>	<i>Bok Choy</i>	
<i>Zinnia</i>	<i>Basil</i>	
<i>Marigold</i>	<i>Parsley</i>	

**Seeds for April winter sowing:**

<i>Tomato</i>	<i>Peppers</i>
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There are some very good web sites on winter sowing with long lists of annuals and perennials that will work in our Zone 5 climate. Some of the work has been done by Master Gardeners in Minnesota and one blog is from Maine. If it can work there, I think we're safe.

**Web sites:**

[www.agardenforthehouse.com](http://www.agardenforthehouse.com) (look under gardening)

[www.wintersown.org](http://www.wintersown.org)

[www.bachmans.com/files/GardenGuide/WinterSowingGuide.pdf](http://www.bachmans.com/files/GardenGuide/WinterSowingGuide.pdf) great pictures

[www.104homestead.com/winter-sow/](http://www.104homestead.com/winter-sow/)

**Materials:**

- Milk or water gallon jugs or
- Quart sized jugs or
- Rotisserie chicken plastic containers with clear lids-cut air holes in the lid as well as the bottom.
- Implement for making holes in plastic such as a Phillips head screw driver with the tip heated on the stove or
- Drill-if you put some water in the jug first and freeze it, then you can more easily push against the jug with the drill bit.
- Potting soil
- Seeds-You'll be surprised where you can find seeds. There are lots at Ocean State Job Lot now. Also, all the mail order seed catalogues are starting to arrive.
- Water

Give it a try. I once grew lots of alyssum using winter sowing. I didn't believe it would work until the day I saw a whole crop of tiny seedlings inside the containers! Let me give you one word of caution from that experiment. I used water bottles. The plants grew well, but when I was trying to get them out of the bottles, the "waist" of the bottle made it VERY hard to get the seedling clump out. I had to cut up every bottle! It's jugs for me now.

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