



Helping Others Learn to Grow



UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
EXTENSION

Our Mission

Extension provides practical research-based programs that help people improve their lives and address critical community issues involving youth, families, economics, health and natural resources.

Extension is an outreach branch of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

"Winter is the time of promise because there is so little to do - or because you can now and then permit yourself the luxury of thinking so."

- Stanley Crawford





Rethink....



What is Winter Sowing?



Seeds planted in “mini greenhouses” during the cold winter months, germinating outside, and ready to transplant once the ground thaws.



How Does it Work?

- Replicate Mother Nature (with a little help)
- Many seeds require “pre-chilling”
- Stratification is the freeze/thaw cycle that helps loosen some hard seed coats.
- Seeds are “smart” .. Do your homework.
- Hardening off is eliminated



Why Winter Sow?

- More fun + less work = EASY
- Economical
- Repurpose recyclable materials
- Pride of growing by seed
- Chases away winter blues
- Selection of plants is amazing

Downfalls of Traditional Seed Starting

- Takes time
- Expensive...
- Takes up space
- Insects
- Damp off
- Small, spindly weak transplants
- Slow hardening off process
- Direct sowing may lose out to critters and weather



Selecting Containers



- Thumb rule
- Plastic gallon milk or clear juice containers
- 2 liter soda bottles
- Foil roasting pans with clear lids
- Salad boxes
- Use your imagination



Container Preparation

- Rinse
- Drainage 6 holes/slits
- Soil
 - n Use good quality potting mix
 - n Depth of at least 3” (thumb)
 - n Soak and drain well
- Air Transpiration ..leave the caps off of milk jugs



Sowing seeds

- Follow seed packet directions
 - n Some seeds require light to germinate, surface sow – columbine, poppies, lettuce, ageratum, snaps, stock
 - n Average depth is twice the seed's diameter
 - n Beans ... do not cover as they might rot in moist soil
- Get good seed to soil contact
- Water gently / mist
- Seal container
- Label or database...

How Much Can They Take?



Placement



- Outdoors
- Should be in part sun
- As temps warm, may need to move to more shade
- Don't allow them to dry out
- Temperature inside container may be 20 degrees warmer than outside

When to Water?



- Want to see condensation inside container
- Don't worry about snow or ice
- Soil should look like moist brownie batter
- If too muddy, add more drainage slits
- If too dry, use duct tape to block slits
- Sprinkle lightly on top or bottom water



Seed Selection

- Annuals
- Perennials – most flower 2nd year from seed
 - n Exceptions may be: blackberry lily, blanket flower, rose campion, verbascum, salvia, agastache
- Vegetables
- Herbs
- Ornamental Grasses
- Trees
- Shrubs



Seed Selection, continued

- Do a little homework
- Packets give you clues:
 - n Needs pre-chilling or stratification
 - n Will colonize, self sows
 - n Hardy seeds, may withstand light frosts
 - n Native names (prairie, mountain, etc.)
 - n Origins (alpine, canadensis, orientale)



Saving Your Own Seed

- Don't need to worry about chaff
- Some hybrids are sterile, i.e., do not produce viable seed
- May or may not come true from seeds
- Seedlings may be like children
- Keep those you like, and compost the rest

Very soon ...



Germination rates are **UNBELIEVABLE**
Seeds know when it's time to sprout!

Hardening Off

- As weather warms, gradually allow more air to circulate
- Prop up lids, add more and bigger slits in tops
- May remove lid completely before planting out
- Weakly fertilize



Planting Out

- When?
 - n When the ground thaws
 - n Second set of leaves
- Hunk 'O Seedlings (HOS)
- Brownie pan – curly parsley
- Keep watered
- Watch for pests



Spring & Summer Sowing?



- “Sweater” rule
- Wait til mid to late March for warm season annuals:
 - n Tomatoes, zinnias, basil
 - n Some ornamental grasses
- May want to “refresh” some garden spots later on
- Watch moisture levels



Can Things Go Wrong?

- Bad seeds, poor viability
- Too much or too little moisture
- Inadequate soil depth
- Planted incorrectly
- Too hot

Winter Sowing

Imagine the Possibilities ...





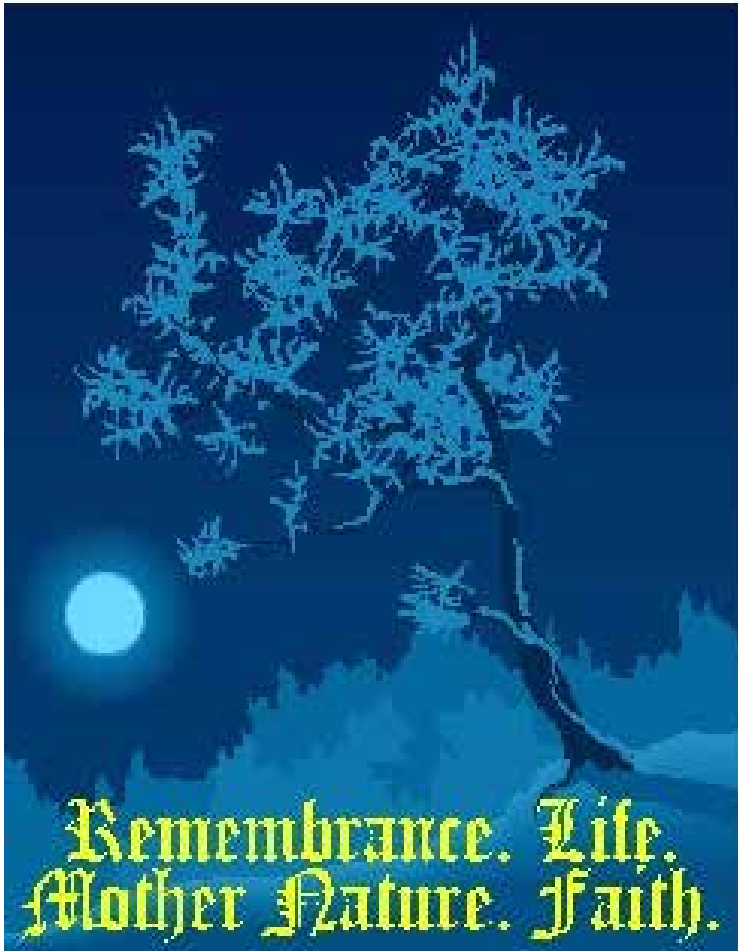








Winter Solstice Celebration



- December 21 or 22
- Sow seeds for:
 - n Remembrance
 - n Life..
 - n Mother Nature
 - n Faith

Can there be too much of a good thing?



Winter Sowing

For more information:
www.wintersown.org

Be careful ... you might start looking forward to winter!