

Sowing Native Seeds Over Winter

Most prairie species seeds require a period of cold, moist conditions (winter) in order to germinate called stratification. To stratify the seeds, we can use mini greenhouses and Mother Nature. Plant the seeds in late fall or early winter, put them outside for the winter, and they will germinate and sprout in the spring.

1) Use a box cutter to cut the milk jug starting near the base of the handle, approximately 4 inches from the bottom, leaving a couple inches of plastic near the handle area so the jug can flip open.

2) Punch 10-15 drainage holes in the bottom of the jug using a pointy object.

3) Add water to some soil in a bucket and stir until the moisture is well distributed. Keep adding water until the soil starts to clump together but don't let it get overly wet.



4) Fill the jug base with the soil to approximately 1 inch from the top. Pat it down gently to have a flat surface to place seeds on.

5) Spread seeds over the soil and cover with a light layer of dry soil: Larger seeds can be covered with up to $\frac{1}{4}$ inch, smaller seeds should have a thinner layer, and very tiny seeds should not be covered at all.

6) Use a spray bottle to moisten the top of the seed bed, which ensures the seeds are not disturbed.

7) Add a plant label to the inside of the container with the name of the species.

8) Use a piece of duct tape a few inches long to tape the jug shut. Don't tape all the way around - you want gaps where air and rain/snow can get it. Leave the cap off the jug. Write the species name on the jug.

9) Place the jug outside in a sunny location for the winter.

Once plants start to emerge (usually early April), pull the tape off the jug and flip open the top on warm days (above 50 degrees). Keep the top on the jug until the threat of freezing temperatures and frost are gone (mid-May); that way you can flip the jug closed again if there is a frost/freeze danger. After that you can cut off the top off the milk carton or leave it on so you can reuse the jug next year. As the seedlings grow, keep the soil moist and remove any weeds.



Once the plants have at least two sets of true leaves, begin to transplant them into pots.

Many factors determine how many of your seeds turn into transplantable plants. Don't feel discouraged if not all of your seeds successfully germinate; variables such as light, soil, water, pests, and seed viability all influence the success of your seedlings.

Source

A Volunteer's Guide to Growing Native Plants:

lwr.d.countyofdane.com/documents/pdfs/Free-Native-Plants/How-to-guide-2019.pdf



madpl.org/seedlibrary