



Winter and Spring Sowing

Get ready for the gardening season by sowing your seeds.

Start by getting your containers ready:

Use clear or translucent plastic containers that are somewhat pliable. Thin or brittle plastic can be difficult to work with and leave sharp edges. Containers should be large enough to hold at least 3 inches of soil and give seedlings 3 or more inches to grow.

Gallon sized milk and similar containers

Rinse the container well and dispose of the cap. Using a utility knife, cut a horizontal line from one side of the handle to the other 3-5 inches from the bottom of the milk jug, leaving a 1-inch hinge. Grab the handle and pull back to open the container. Again, do not cut all the way around so that you have a hinge.



Bakery, takeout, produce, or other plastic containers

Wash and rinse the container well. Poke holes in the top and bottom using a box cutter or utility knife to allow for snow melt, watering, and drainage.

Once your containers are ready:

1. Add approximately 3 inches of soil to your container, then level the soil to get rid of peaks, valleys, and clumps. Do not pack soil down, your seeds will need space to grow roots.

2. Add seeds to soil and spread evenly. Use as many as you wish, but only use one plant type per container.



3. Cover with soil matching the diameter of the seed. For example, if the seed is 1/8 inch in diameter, add 1/8 inch of soil over the seeds. Additional soil is not needed if the seeds are very tiny.
4. Place a plant label or empty seed packet against the inside of the container wall. Additional information should be tracked either on the label or somewhere handy. Important notes include color, light requirements, height, and other traits of the plant. Also mark the outside of the container with plant name and date in at least two areas. Use a waterproof marker and write either directly on the plastic surface or on labels adhered to the container.
5. Close the container cover and tape in place. Clear duct tape or clear heavy duty packing tape works well.
6. Water well so the soil is muddy, and water drains out of the bottom.

- Place the container outside on the east, west, or south facing side of your property. Allow snow to pile on the top, as the snow melts it will provide moisture to the soil. Your containers should have condensation droplets forming inside but should not drip excessively through the bottom holes. If you do not see any condensation and there is no snow on top of the container, then lightly water to keep the soil moist.

Important Notes:

Containers should get approximately 6 hours of sunlight each day. Place the containers away from play areas and out of reach of curious pets. Do not put under decks or rooflines.

Sowing timeline for a typical Minnesota winter:

January February, March: perennial flowers and hardy annual flowers

Late March: cold crops

Early April: tender annual flowers and herbs

Mid-April: warm crops

Helpful Tips:

Use potter's mix or a soil mix that includes organic materials and moisture control.

Watch containers for drying and water if necessary. Be very gentle when watering small seedlings.

As the weather warms, opening containers during the day and closing at night when the temperature is cool or below freezing may encourage faster growth.

On hot spring days, you may want to move your containers to receive less sun. They should not be allowed to completely dry out.



Remove the lid of your container as the seedlings mature and the weather warms up. Once lids are removed you may want to take precautions against squirrels, rabbits, deer, and other pests. Place chicken wire or mesh on top of the open container or move containers into large boxes – but make sure they still get sunlight.

Wait for the mature roots to grow before dividing. Be patient! Some seedlings take longer than others to appear, and plants don't grow at consistent rates – even in the same container.

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