

Instructions for Winter Native Seed Sowing in Milk Jugs



1. Gather Materials

You'll need:

- Clean, clear or translucent 1-gallon milk jugs (remove labels)
- Scissors or utility knife
- Potting mix (not garden soil)
- Duct tape or packing tape
- Permanent marker
- Native seeds (e.g., milkweed, coneflower, black-eyed Susan, wild bergamot, etc.)
- Water

2. Prepare the Jugs

- Cut around the jug horizontally about 4 inches up from the bottom — leave a small hinge under the handle so it can open like a clamshell.
- Poke drainage holes (4–6) in the bottom with a heated nail, screwdriver, or awl.
- Poke a few air holes near the top for ventilation.

3. Add Soil

- Fill the bottom half with 3–4 inches of moist potting mix.
- The mix should be damp like a wrung-out sponge — not soggy.
- Smooth the surface gently.

4. Sow the Seeds

- Scatter the seeds on the soil surface according to the species' light requirements:
- Surface-sow for seeds that need light (many native wildflowers).
- Cover lightly with 1/8"–1/4" soil for seeds that need darkness.
- Gently press them in so they make good contact with the soil. Label the jug clearly with permanent marker (on the jug and the cap).

5. Water and Seal

- Mist or lightly water to settle the seeds.
- Close the jug and tape around the cut seam to keep it together.
- Leave the cap off for airflow and moisture exchange.

6. Place Outside

- Set the sealed jugs outside in full sun — on the ground, not on pavement.
- Ideal time in Michigan: late December through February. Let nature provide the freeze-thaw cycles that many native seeds need for stratification.
- Snow and rain will enter through the open spout to keep soil moist.

7. Watch for Germination in Spring

- As temperatures warm (March–April), seedlings will begin to sprout.
- Once they're growing steadily, open the tops during the day for ventilation.
- Gradually remove the tops completely when nighttime temps stay above freezing.

8. Transplant

When seedlings have 2–3 sets of true leaves:

- Harden them off gradually by exposing them to outdoor conditions.
- Transplant into garden beds or pots in late spring, after danger of frost.

Tips for Best Success

- Always label each jug clearly (permanent marker fades—some people add a plastic tag inside too).
 - Don't overwater; moisture from snow/rain is usually enough.
 - Be patient: some natives germinate the first spring; others may wait until the second spring.
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Michigan native plants/grasses that do especially well with winter sowing in milk jugs

These species naturally experience cold winters, so the freeze-thaw cycles help break seed dormancy and improve germination.

Common Name	Scientific Name	Bloom Time	Notes
Common Milkweed	<i>Asclepias syriaca</i>	Summer	Monarch host; easy to winter sow.
Swamp Milkweed	<i>Asclepias incarnata</i>	Summer	Prefers moist soil; pink blooms.
Butterfly Weed	<i>Asclepias tuberosa</i>	Summer	Bright orange; full sun.
Black-eyed Susan	<i>Rudbeckia hirta</i>	Summer-Fall	Fast grower; tolerant of many soils.
Purple Coneflower	<i>Echinacea purpurea</i>	Summer	Pollinator favorite; drought-tolerant.
Wild Bergamot (Bee Balm)	<i>Monarda fistulosa</i>	Summer	Attracts bees and hummingbirds.
Blue Vervain	<i>Verbena hastata</i>	Summer	Loves damp soil; tall and showy.
Ox-eye Sunflower	<i>Heliopsis helianthoides</i>	Summer	Easy and long-blooming.
Prairie Blazing Star	<i>Liatris pycnostachya</i>	Mid-Late Summer	Vertical purple spikes; butterflies.
New England Aster	<i>Symphyotrichum novae-angliae</i>	Fall	Late-season nectar.
Little Bluestem	<i>Schizachyrium scoparium</i>	Late Summer	Compact grass; copper fall color.
Big Bluestem	<i>Andropogon gerardii</i>	Summer-Fall	Tall prairie grass.
Switchgrass	<i>Panicum virgatum</i>	Summer-Fall	Upright, airy seed heads.
Indian Grass	<i>Sorghastrum nutans</i>	Summer-Fall	Golden plumes; vertical accent.
Wild Columbine	<i>Aquilegia canadensis</i>	Spring	Shade; hummingbird favorite.
Jacob's Ladder	<i>Polemonium reptans</i>	Spring	Woodland native; delicate blue flowers.
Virginia Bluebells	<i>Mertensia virginica</i>	Spring	Prefers moist, shady spots.
Wild Geranium	<i>Geranium maculatum</i>	Spring	Shade tolerant; long-lived perennial.
Joe Pye Weed	<i>Eutrochium maculatum</i>	Summer-Fall	Tall; pollinator magnet.
Cardinal Flower	<i>Lobelia cardinalis</i>	Summer	Bright red; hummingbirds.
Blue Flag Iris	<i>Iris versicolor</i>	Spring-Summer	Michigan's native iris; wet areas.
Boneset	<i>Eupatorium perfoliatum</i>	Summer	Moist soil native; white blooms.



Winter Sowing

YouTube how-to video by Wild Ones Greater Cleveland
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RPzKTshpGgI>



Website:
RiverCityWildOnes.org



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