



# Growing Native Plants from Seed

Most natives are perennials and require a bit more time (and patience!) to grow from seed. When growing native plants from seed, it is important to understand that just because you aren't seeing a lot of growth in the beginning, that doesn't mean nothing is happening. In fact, the phrase, "The first year they sleep, the second year they creep, and the third year they leap," is commonly used to describe the growth habits of many native plants. The first year to two they are often trying to put most of their energy into establishing a strong root system and many native plants will not bloom until the second or even third summer.

Giving them the time to establish themselves will result in stronger and healthier plants in the long run.

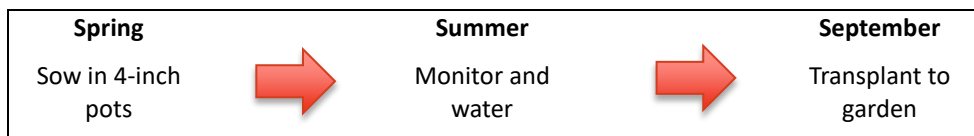
## SUMMARY -- NATIVE SEED SOWING TIMELINE

This is our recommended method for sowing ALL types of native seeds:



OR

An alternative method only for seeds that do not require stratification:



## SOWING NATIVE SEEDS

We offer two types of native seeds: those that require cold, moist stratification, which means that they need to be exposed to cold temperatures and a moist environment in order for them to break their dormancy and germinate, and those that can be sown without any type of stratification.

Your seed packet should indicate whether or not the seeds require stratification. If it does not, you can do a Google search to find out the germination requirements for your seeds.

### *Germination Instructions for Seeds that Require Stratification*

There are three different ways that you can stratify these seeds.

1. **(STRONGLY RECOMMENDED) Winter sow the seeds in milk jugs.** This is our favorite method! We recommend this method because it's easy to protect the seeds from critters and weed competition, and the winter sowing technique results in hardier seedlings.
  - Sow seeds in milk jugs in late December, January, or February. Set the jugs outside over the winter to allow the freeze/thaw cycles to provide the stratification.

- Pot up to 4-inch pots in June. Allow the plants to continue to grow and establish roots throughout the summer.
  - Transplant to their permanent location in September after the temps have cooled.
  - See our *Winter Seed Sowing* handout for more details.
2. **Direct sow your seeds in late fall** on a weed-free section of your garden/planting area and allow the seeds to overwinter. The freeze/thaw cycles over the winter will provide the stratification.
  3. **Use your refrigerator to artificially stratify seeds.**
    - Place ¼ cup (or more) sand or peat moss in a mixing bowl. You can use silica sand from a building supply center.
    - Moisten the mixture slowly to a moist but not wet consistency. You should be able to form a ball with the mixture.
    - Add your desired seed amount to the dampened mixture. Mix thoroughly.
    - Place mixture in a labeled Ziploc bag and seal.
    - Store in the refrigerator (33-38 degrees F) for the number of days indicated on your seed packet. (Typically, 30 days is sufficient.)
    - If seeds start to sprout in the bag, remove immediately and either plant in the ground or in pots until it's time to plant outdoors.
    - After the seeds have been stratified for the recommended number of days and once there's no more chance of frost in your area, spread the seed mixture on bare soil.

#### *Germination Instructions for Seeds That Do Not Require Stratification*

Some native seeds do not require stratification. Even though they do not need to be stratified, **we still recommend that these seeds be sown using the winter sowing method** (see above) because it gives the seeds protection from critters and weed competition, and the greenhouse effect that the milk jugs provide in the spring helps to accelerate the seedlings' growth rate.

Alternatively, in the early spring, you can sow these seeds in 4-inch pots, cover with hardware cloth to protect from the critters, set outside in a sunny spot, monitor and water throughout the summer, and then transplant to the garden/planting area in late September, after temperatures have cooled.

We do not recommend that you directly sow seeds because of weed competition and it can be difficult to distinguish the native seedlings from weeds.



## Let's grow together, Door County!

*The Door County Seed Library is a collaborative community program of the Door County Master Gardeners Association that offers free seeds and educational programs.*

*Find us at your local Door County Library branch and special events.*

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



Version: September 7, 2024