

carWinter Seed Sowing Party

A project from Homegrown National Park®

What to know

A Winter Sowing Party is a fun, hands-on community activity where participants create simple “mini-greenhouses” from recycled containers and plant native seeds that will sprout naturally in spring. Many native seeds require a period of cold stratification to germinate, making winter the perfect time to start them. It’s low-cost, beginner-friendly, and a great way to help people bring nature home during the colder months.

Season

Winter

For

Communities, Teams, Families, Schools

Event Duration

30+ Minutes

Instructions

Step 1 | Choose the Date & Time

Winter sowing relies on natural cold periods to prepare seeds for spring. Winter sowing parties work best anytime from late December through February, depending on your local climate. Choose a weekend or weeknight time that's accessible to your community.

Step 2 | Secure a Location & Consider a Sponsor

Some location options include a community center, apartment courtyard, farmers market, garden club building, or your own yard. Containers can easily be recycled milk jugs, but you can also use planting trays if you want to make them in bulk.

💡 Consider asking whether a local group can co-host or sponsor the event, such as a nursery, garden club, native plant society, or community organization. Sponsors may help with space, promotion, or materials. They may also come with a bit of expertise in caring for the plants.

💡 If you don't have a sponsor, consider a suggested donation or charging a flat fee per person to help cover material costs (containers, soil, and plants are typically the biggest expense). See full materials list below.

♻️ Consider using recycled gallon jugs saved up by your own household or neighbors.

Step 3 | Prepare Your Seeds

A key part of planning is choosing what seeds to offer. It's best to offer a range of bloom times (spring, summer, fall) to support wildlife throughout the season. You can:

- A. Use collected local native seeds: Great if you've saved seeds from your yard or community.
- B. Purchase or source seeds via:

Your Favorite Native Seed Provider - Seed packets are typically \$3-\$5

Native Flora Seeds - All proceeds support Homegrown National Park.

<https://nativefloraseeds.org/>

You can learn the most ecologically productive plants for your ecoregion by using the HNP

Keystone Plant Tool: <https://homegrownnationalpark.org/keystone-plants/>

Step 4 | Promote the Event

Some methods for advertising:

- Email announcement
- Facebook Event
- Flyer for local sharing

Optional: Encourage participants to bring a friend.

Here is a general description to help you begin your advertising:

Winter Sowing Native Plant Party

Join us for a hands-on workshop where you'll learn the simple and effective method of winter sowing—an easy way to start native plants outdoors during the colder months. We'll watch a short video introduction from entomologist Doug Tallamy, then plant several containers using regionally appropriate native seeds. Each participant will leave with multiple planted jugs ready to place outside all winter and transplant in spring. All materials are provided, and beginners are welcome!

Below is our recommended timeline:

Social media

Post 1–2 weeks before your event (include photos, the film trailer, or graphics)

Create a Facebook event and invite your network

Tag local groups, organizations, or influencers

Email

Send a save-the-date, a reminder 1-2 weeks before, and a final reminder the day before

Flyers

Hang them at libraries, cafés, schools, and community centers

Partnerships

Ask local nurseries, conservation groups, or schools to co-host or spread the word

Event Day

Step 5 | Set Up the Space

Arrange tables so people can walk around and see all the seeds. When people bring plants to drop off, it's important that you ensure the seeds are a native species and know any additional information needed for the plant tag. Prepare the table with clearly marked categories, such as:

- Spring Bloom, Fall Bloom, Summer Bloom
- Shade Tolerant, Sun Loving, Attracts Butterflies

Set out a pre-planted jug to show the finished example.

Optional: Offer simple snacks or drinks.

Optional: Play Doug Tallamy's short video "[What's the Rush?](#)" before planting. (You'll need to set up audio and video ahead of time)

Step 6 | Demonstrate the Winter Sowing Steps

Show participants how to prepare their first jug:

1. Poke 6 drainage holes in the bottom.
2. Cut around the jug horizontally, leaving a hinge at the handle.
3. Add 3–4 inches of moist potting soil.
4. Label the plant on a wooden stake and place it inside.
5. Sprinkle a pinch of seeds and press gently.
6. Spray lightly with water.
7. Tape the jug closed.
8. Label the outside clearly.

Guide everyone through their first jug together, then let participants continue at their own pace.

Step 7 | Wrap Up & Send Participants Home with Their Jugs

Remind people to:

- Place jugs outside immediately (snow and rain help) in a sunny, protected location (a southeast-facing spot is perfect).
- Water only if the soil looks dry.
- Open jugs after the last frost.
- Transplant seedlings when they develop 2–3 real leaves—not counting the first small baby leaves (cotyledons).

Encourage participants to add their new native plants on the [HNP Biodiversity Map](#) in spring.

 Instead of printing out a ton of take-home papers, send your attendees a follow-up email with materials included. If you don't want to collect emails have them scan a QR code to the materials, they can choose what to print.

Step 8 | Report Back and Help Us Improve!

Sharing your attendance numbers and event details is crucial. Your input directly helps us measure our collective impact and improve our resources. Did you do something special? We would love to see your marketing materials, photos, and hear about unique details to feature and incorporate for future events! [Contribute Your Feedback Here](#)

Keep in Mind

- Create a welcoming, inclusive experience for all ages and abilities.
- Attendees will likely want care instruction for home.
- Keep things simple, this should be beginner friendly.

Materials

- ☐ Name tags and markers/pens
 -  Laminated name tags and whiteboard markers
- ☐ Clean gallon jugs (4–5 per person)
 -  Collect recycled containers or encourage participants to bring their own
- ☐ Potting soil
- ☐ Spray bottles
- ☐ Trowels, scoopers, or cups for soil
- ☐ Native plants (see recommended resources above)
- ☐ Wooden or plastic plant labels
- ☐ Scissors
- ☐ Duck/duct tape
- ☐ Watering cans or a water source on site
- ☐ Pre-planted demo container
- ☐ Aprons (optional)
- ☐ Signage by plant type (sun/shade/pollinator)
- ☐ Tables or a working space
- ☐ Chairs (optional)
- ☐ [HNP flyers/brochures](#)
- ☐ Books/printed references
- ☐ A handout with some of your favorite resources: Homegrown National Park links, local native plant sellers, your closest Wild Ones chapter, state/local Native Plant Society, conservation groups, any co-hosting organizations
 -  Single laminated copy with a QR code or listed in a agenda follow-up email instead of printing

Related HNP Activities

- [Seed/Plant Giveaway or Swap](#) - if you have an abundance of plants in the spring this is a great way to distribute them!
- [Tabling Event](#) - Winter sowing is an easy task that can be done at a tabling event and participants get a free take-home.

Examples



Thank you



This project was contributed by Liz Myers-Chamberlin