

**Tennessee Tree Day is happening again.** Reserve your trees now for the best selection! The Sullivan County Ag. Center at 140 Spurgeon Lane, Blountville, TN will be a pick-up site on March 20th and March 21<sup>st</sup> 2026. Choose from redbuds, birches, sumacs, oaks, persimmons, elderberries, and more for a very reasonable cost. To reserve your trees, go to: <https://www.tectn.org/tennesseetreeday.html>

## **Winter Sowing** (published 2025-12-13)

By Earl Hockin, Master Gardener

If you want to use an easy way to germinate seeds of cool-season vegetables so you do less work than maintaining them indoors or don't have an indoor space to start seeds, you will find doing what is termed winter sowing to be very successful. It is an inexpensive and easy way to produce strong, healthy plants, allowing you to grow commonly grown varieties available in local nurseries and varieties that are not usually available in your local area.

There are several advantages. One, you need to do very little watering, if any at all. Growing them outdoors means the plants will be naturally hardened off. They also germinate without any competition from weeds. Winter sowing can be done for virtually any type of plant for your garden, including different flowering plants, herbs, and vegetables.

Your containers need to be those that can allow light to enter, such as milk jugs, water bottles, deli containers, and those that are used for salad greens. Be sure to wash and rinse them to remove any milk or food. Leave the lids off the bottles, puncture some holes in the tops of salad greens and others, and make some drainage holes in the bottom of all the containers.



For native plants and perennials, be sure to put at least 4 inches of potting mix in the bottom of the container. Herbs and vegetables need at least two inches of potting mix, but will benefit from having more. Jugs and bottles need to be cut in half with at least 4 inches of bottom left for filling with potting mix and seeding. Water the mixture with enough water to have some water draining out the bottom. Be sure to tap or lightly press the potting mix to remove air pockets in the mix. Label the container with a waterproof marker.

When sowing the seeds in the container, space them apart from one another so they can be easily cut or torn apart when you go to transplant the seedlings into your garden bed. Be sure to plant only one type of seed in each container.

In December you can use winter sowing to start perennial flowers, hardy annuals, and plants that require exposure to cold temperatures before germinating. Vegetables include peas, spinach, broccoli, Brussel sprouts, and onions. January is the time to start most herbs and frost-tolerant vegetables, including beets, basil, bok choy,

cabbage, dill, and lettuce, particularly loose-leaf varieties. February is the time to start corn, cucumber, peppers, sweet potato slips, eggplant, melons, and tomatoes. You can continue using this technique into April for starting your warm-season plants.

Some of the sites that describe winter sowing include:

“All the Dirt on Winter Sowing,”

<https://extension.umd.edu/sites/extension.umd.edu/files/2021-12/All%20the%20Dirt%20on%20Winter%20Sowing%20Power%20Point.pdf>

“Winter Seed Sowing in Milk Jugs: A Gardener’s Guide to Early Starts and Resilient Plants,”

<https://beaufort.ces.ncsu.edu/2024/12/winter-seed-sowing-in-milk-jugs-a-gardeners-guide-to-early-starts-and-resilient-plants/>

For more information about gardening, visit UTHORT’s YouTube site for helpful videos:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCjS3d1IklH1OZ1Z2qPvhgfQ>

Or Washington County’s YouTube site: <https://www.youtube.com/@utextensionwashingtoncounty>

### **How do I ask a question?**

If you have questions for the Master Gardeners, submit them to us on our website at [www.netmga.net](http://www.netmga.net). Click the link at the top of the page, “ASK A MASTER GARDENER” to send in your question. Questions that are not answered in this column will receive a response from a Master Gardener to the contact information you provide.

**2026 MASTER GARDENER PROGRAM** Enroll now for classes at the Sullivan County Extension office beginning January 27, 2026. Go to [2026 Tennessee Extension Master Gardener Program/Training | Sullivan County](#) for details.

*The Master Gardener Program is offered by the University of Tennessee Extension. The purpose of the Master Gardener program is to train people as horticultural-educated volunteers. These volunteers work in partnership with the local Extension office in their counties to expand educational outreach, providing home gardeners with researched-based information.*