

Fun and Creative Wintertime Projects (published 2026-11-28)
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There's so much to do to get ready for spring gardening. But remember to have this winter, too. Now is a great time to put your creativity to use with fun projects. For example, how about making garden art from yard sale or thrift store finds. I bought a small birdcage & hung it on a shepherd's hook in one of my gardens. You can find all sorts of ceramic pots, old signs, figurines, window frames, mirrors, rusty tools, or even some stained-glass pieces at thrift shops. Any of these can become interesting additions to your gardens with little or no effort.

Pick up those fallen branches

If you have trees and fallen branches, they can be transformed into plant supports like tomato cages or small trellises. If you have indoor vines, branches can make a rustic support for them, too. It is as simple as binding the branches with twine to hold them together. No tools or special skill needed!

Make plant labels

Just about anything can become a plant label. If you have paint stirrers, they can morph into plant labels. You can paint the image of a veggie on them and/or write the plant name. Got rocks? Take flattish ones, paint a background color (or not), then write the plant name on it. Wooden spoons, used ones or inexpensive new ones, can also become plant labels with paint and writing. Tongue depressors, popsicle sticks, corks pushed onto skewers, jar lids, broken clay pot pieces, seashells – well, you get the idea. Anything has the potential to be reborn as a plant label.

Bombs away

Making seed bombs is a fun project for kids of every age. There are two methods, both of which are a bit messy. For the seeds, use primarily native wildflower seeds from a reputable source. The Xerces Society can help you locate seed vendors: <https://xerces.org/pollinator-conservation/native-plant-nursery-and-seed-directory>.

One method is to make a pulp from shredded newspaper as the base of the bomb. It requires a blender, shredded newspaper and water. Make a soupy mixture of pulp, then strain it to remove extra water. Take some of the pulp and add wildflower seeds then top with more pulp. Squeeze again to remove more water, shape into a ball, then place in a container like an egg carton and allow to dry. Any exposed seeds need to be covered with more pulp. The bombs can be scattered in spring. Make sure to water them after tossing and regularly to help with germination.

The other method uses soil, compost, sand and water to create the balls/bombs. Combine 3 tablespoonfuls of soil, 1 tablespoonful of compost and 1 tablespoonful of sand. Add ½ teaspoonful of native wildflower seeds and mix well. Add water slowly to make a cookie-dough consistency so it will cling together to form a ball. Divide the mixture into 8 to 10 pieces and form into small balls. Place the balls on aluminum foil and allow to dry for 24 hours.

When ready to distribute in spring, make sure the balls hit bare soil. No need to water. Nature will take it from there.

One more messy, fun project - Ooey, gooey suet mix for birds

Winter is the hardest times for birds. There are few if any insects for them to eat and the cold temperatures mean they need extra energy to survive. There are several recipes for using suet or lard and/or peanut butter mixed with bird seeds, cornmeal, or cracked corn. Check out “Backyard Birding Guides #2 - Suet and Other Winter Bird Feeding Recipes,” at <https://hnr.k-state.edu/extension/horticulture-resource-center/publications/publications/wildlife/Suet%20and%20Other%20Winter%20Bird%20Feeding%20Recipes.pdf> for recipes. Another great recipe is “Lucy’s Homemade Bird Suet Recipes,” available at <https://nhaudubon.org/bird-suet-recipe/>

Get the family together and have some fun that benefits you and Mother Nature.

Resources

“Make Your Own Wildflower Seed Bombs,” <https://niusteam.niu.edu/make-your-own-wildflower-seed-bombs/>

“How to Make Seed Balls,” <https://www.wildflower.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/How-to-Make-Seed-Balls-.pdf>

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. 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.

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.