

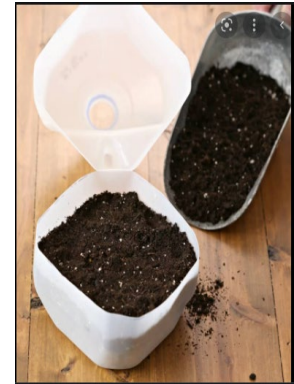


Winter Sowing of New England Asters



Supplies:

- Gallon plastic jug – as in milk jug, water jug – clean and dry – no cap
- Something sharp to poke holes – drill bit, scissors, pick
- Sharp scissors or box cutter to cut jug
- Moistened potting soil – extra vermiculite/perlite a plus!
- Aster seeds
- Spray bottle with water
- Shipping tape or duct tape



Steps:

1. In the bottom of the jug, poke 20 small drainage holes of about 1/8" diameter.
2. Cut through jug on 3 sides just below the handle, leaving the side with the handle attached to bottom, with lots of height for long healthy roots to grow.
3. Add moistened potting soil to the bottom of the jug to just shy of the height of the cut – if you have extra vermiculite or perlite around, add some.
4. Sow all the seeds evenly on top. It is okay if the seeds are close together. Most native plants do better when planted thickly.
5. Press seeds into the soil, but don't cover them. They need light.
6. Mist with water to moisten seeds.
7. Tape the container back together with duct tape or shipping tape.
8. Place outside along a south facing wall. Make sure there is no roof overhang that would prevent snow and rain from getting in the bottle top. The area must drain well. Do not let the pots sit in water or the plants will rot.
9. In spring, when there are 4-6 sets of leaves on the plants, take the top off of the jug. If it is dry outside, your young plants will need to be watered, both when they are still in the jug and after they are planted in the garden.
10. In early summer, you can transplant your young plants into your flower garden!



The milk jugs protect the seeds and young plants from predators. They allow the seeds to germinate naturally. **Asters are perennials – they will come back every year!**





Winter Sowing of New England Asters

New England Aster - *Aster novae-angliae* – *Symphotrichum novae-angliae*

Blooms ranging from blue-purple to lavender-pink pop in the late summer and fall. A large, showy native aster that is a must-have autumn nectar source for pollinators. Grow in full sun in average to moist soil. It is a large, showy aster covered in 1 1/2" blooms with golden centers in colors that range from blue-purple to lavender-pink. The New England aster is a must-have autumn nectar source for pollinators, including Monarchs as they stock up for their travels to Mexico.

Originally occurring in moist prairies, meadows, thickets, low valleys and stream banks throughout the eastern United States, New England aster grows in full sun in average to moist soil. It can tolerate a variety of conditions and soil types.

Aster species are a staple in plantings with the intention of erosion control and pollinator habitat. They are populated in our meadows, bioswales, and constructed wetlands, bringing late season color and pollinator nectar sources in our natural areas.

Asters are a Keystone Plant for our area – a plant our ecosystem cannot live without. They are a prime source of fall food for all pollinators and butterflies. 11 species of butterflies and moths use it as a host plant – which benefits birds. The main food for baby birds is caterpillars – so to support our birds, we need to plant lots of plants that grow caterpillars! In the wintertime, they provide food and habitat for many birds and small animals that feast on the seeds and find shelter in the dried stalks.

The Xerces Society has named it of special value to all native bees and especially bumble bees. Our native bees are disappearing at an alarming rate, which is another reason native plants are also missing. Bumble bees have disappeared from the New England states and their numbers have fallen drastically in New York state. They need all the help we can give them.

Once established, it lasts for years, becoming thicker each year.

Link to video on winter sowing:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SKXY6dl-5Tk>

