

Winter Sowing: A Simple Guide to Growing Cancer-Fighting Foods

By Missy Hamilton, Garden Manager, Meals 4 Health and Healing

Hello there, fellow garden enthusiasts! I'm Missy Hamilton, and as the Garden Manager at Meals 4 Health and Healing, I'm excited to share one of my favorite gardening techniques with you—winter sowing. Whether you're a seasoned gardener or a curious beginner, winter sowing is a fun, accessible, and sustainable way to jump-start your garden. It allows you to sow seeds outdoors in the cold months using simple recycled containers. Not only does this method help you get a head start on the growing season, but it also produces robust, healthy plants that can play a role in fighting cancer with their nutrient-rich, healing properties.

Winter sowing works by mimicking the natural cold stratification process many seeds require. In nature, seeds experience a period of cold before sprouting in spring, and by sowing them in a mini-greenhouse made from everyday plastic containers, you give them just what they need. It's an environmentally friendly technique that recycles plastic while producing a bounty of vegetables and herbs—many of which are known for their cancer-fighting compounds.

I also want to take a moment to invite individuals, families, and teens to get involved in our garden at Meals 4 Health and Healing. Volunteering in our garden is a great way to learn new skills, enjoy nature, and help produce nourishing food for our community. We're always looking for enthusiastic teen volunteers for our teen classes—if you know someone who might be interested, please spread the word and reach out to volunteer@hfmeals.org

What Is Winter Sowing?

Winter sowing is essentially seed starting outdoors in cold weather using repurposed plastic containers as mini-greenhouses. The seeds inside experience winter's chill, which naturally conditions them for spring growth. This process results in hardier seedlings that are already acclimated to the outdoor environment, making the eventual transition to the garden a smooth one.

When Can I Start Winter Sowing?

In our region here in Tennessee, late February and March offer excellent conditions for winter sowing many cold-hardy vegetables and herbs. Although some seeds can be sown as early as December or January, these later months are perfect for crops that are not only resilient but also packed with health-promoting nutrients. As the days gradually grow longer and temperatures slowly climb, your seeds will begin their journey toward a robust spring garden.

Essential Supplies for Winter Sowing

Before you get started, here's a list of supplies you'll need:

- **Clear Plastic Containers:** Recycled milk jugs, takeout containers, or clear salad boxes work wonderfully.
- **Cutting Tool:** A pair of sharp scissors or a utility knife to create drainage holes.
- **Seed Starting Mix or Potting Soil:** Choose a high-quality mix that's light and drains well.
- **Seeds:** Select your favorite cancer-fighting herbs and vegetables (see suggestions below).
- **Watering Can or Spray Bottle:** For gently moistening the soil.
- **Labels and a Marker:** To note what seeds are planted in which container.
- **Optional Extras:** Newspaper or paper towels for lining containers and keeping them clean, and a tray to organize your containers outdoors.

Cancer-Fighting Herbs and Vegetables to Sow

A diet rich in fruits, vegetables, and herbs can be a powerful ally in the fight against cancer. Here are some fantastic options to consider for your winter sowing:

Cruciferous Vegetables

These plants are celebrated for compounds like sulforaphane and glucosinolates, which have been linked to cancer prevention.

- Broccoli: An excellent source of fiber, vitamins, and cancer-fighting phytochemicals.
- Kale: Loaded with antioxidants and immune-boosting vitamins.
- Cabbage: Offers detoxifying glucosinolates that help in cancer prevention.

Leafy Greens

Leafy greens are nutrient-dense and full of antioxidants.

- Spinach: Rich in beta-carotene and folate, which promote overall wellness.
- Swiss Chard: A versatile green with anti-inflammatory properties.
- Arugula: Adds a peppery kick to salads while providing beneficial nutrients.

Allium Vegetables

Known for their sulfur compounds, these vegetables help support detoxification.

- Garlic: Famous for its immune-boosting and potential anti-cancer properties.
- Onions: Packed with antioxidants like quercetin.
- Leeks: A milder alternative that still offers a wealth of vitamins.

Healing Herbs

Herbs not only enhance flavor but also come packed with healing benefits.

- Parsley: Contains apigenin, which may help inhibit cancer cell growth.
- Cilantro: Helps the body detoxify and brings a fresh burst of flavor.
- Thyme and Oregano: Both are high in antioxidants and have natural antimicrobial properties.

How to Winter Sow: A Step-by-Step Guide

1. Prepare Your Container: Choose a clear plastic container with a secure lid. Using a pair of scissors or a utility knife, carefully cut several drainage holes in the bottom.
2. Fill with Soil: Add about 3 to 4 inches of seed starting mix or quality potting soil.
3. Plant Your Seeds: Scatter your seeds evenly over the soil. Follow specific seed packet instructions regarding depth and spacing, then lightly cover them with a thin layer of soil.
4. Water Gently: Moisten the soil using a watering can or spray bottle. Ensure the soil is damp but not waterlogged.
5. Label Your Containers: Use labels and a marker to note the type of seeds and the date of sowing.
6. Place Outdoors: Set your containers in a sunny, sheltered area where they can experience natural weather conditions. Rain and snow will help keep the soil moist and gradually warm it as the season changes.
7. Monitor Growth: As temperatures rise and days lengthen, you'll notice seedlings emerging. Once they're sturdy enough and the risk of frost has passed, transplant them into your garden.

Get Involved and Grow Together

Gardening is not just about growing food—it's about cultivating community and well-being. At Meals 4 Health and Healing, we're passionate about providing volunteer opportunities for

individuals, families, and teens. If you're looking for a way to learn new gardening skills, enjoy the outdoors, or simply be part of a caring community, consider joining us in the garden.

For more details on how to get involved or to sign up as a volunteer, please visit our website and email volunteer@hfmeals.org . Let's work together to grow healthy, healing food and nurture our community, one seed at a time.

Happy winter sowing,

Missy Hamilton

Garden Manager, Meals 4 Health and Healing