

Winter Sowing Guide: Snail Roll Method in Milk Jugs

Space-Efficient Seed Starting with Recycled Materials

What is Winter Sowing?

Winter sowing uses recycled milk jugs as mini-greenhouses to start seeds outdoors in winter. Seeds naturally stratify through freeze-thaw cycles and germinate in spring. The snail roll method maximizes space - fitting 50-100+ seeds per jug.

Materials Needed

Gallon milk jugs (clear)

Plastic feed bags

Duct tape

Sharp knife/scissors

Potting mix (pre-moistened)

Rubber bands

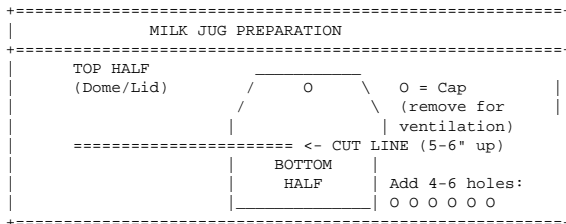
Permanent marker

Seeds (cold-hardy varieties)

Step-by-Step Instructions

1. Prepare Milk Jug

Cut jug 5-6 inches from bottom. Keep both halves. Add 4-6 drainage holes to bottom.



2. Cut Feed Bag Strips

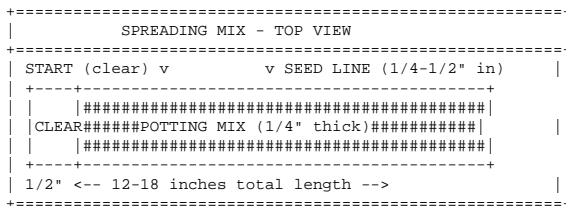
Width: 4-5 inches • Length: 12-18 inches • Makes 3-6 rolls per jug

3. Pre-Moisten Potting Mix

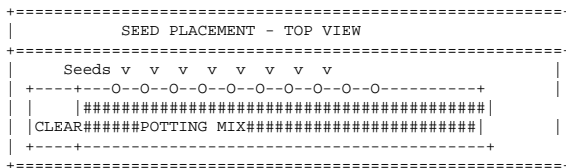
Mix until it holds shape when squeezed but doesn't drip. Let sit 10-15 minutes.

4. Create Snail Rolls

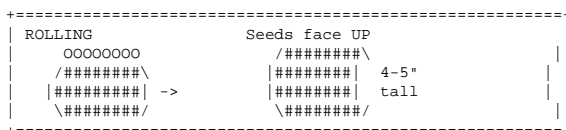
A. Spread Mix: Place feed bag strip flat. Spread moist potting mix 1/4 inch thick. Leave 1/2 inch clear at one end.



B. Add Seeds: Place seeds in line 1/4-1/2 inch from top edge. Press gently. Spacing: Fine 1/4", Medium 1/2", Large 1"



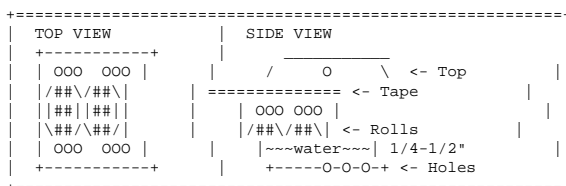
C. Roll: Start from clear edge (opposite seeds). Roll snugly. Keep seeds at TOP. Final diameter: 2-3 inches.



D. Secure: Wrap 1-2 rubber bands around roll. Make snug but not crushing.

5. Arrange in Jug

Stand rolls upright, seeds UP. Add 1/4-1/2 inch water to bottom. Fits 3-6 rolls.



6. Seal & Label

Place top over bottom. Seal with duct tape. Leave cap off/loose. Label: variety, date, roll IDs.

7. Place Outdoors

Best: South-facing, protected from wind, elevated on bricks. **Avoid:** Deep shade, low spots, exposed areas.

Weekly Care: Check moisture, add water if dry • Remove cap on warm days (60F+) • Replace broken bands • Watch for spring germination

8. Transplant

When: 2-3 inches tall, 2-4 true leaves, nights above 40F. **How:** Remove roll, remove bands, unroll strip, separate seedlings, plant. No hardening off needed!

Quick Reference Tables

Best Seeds for Winter Sowing

Cold-Hardy Annuals	Snapdragons, Alyssum, Larkspur, Calendula, Poppies
Perennials	Coneflowers, Black-eyed Susans, Columbine, Milkweed
Vegetables	Lettuce, Spinach, Kale, Arugula, Onions
Herbs	Parsley, Chives, Cilantro, Oregano
AVOID	Tomatoes, Peppers, Basil, Cucumbers

Timing by Hardiness Zone

Zone	Start	Germination	Transplant
3-4	Late Feb-Mar	Late Apr-May	May-Jun
5-6	Mid Jan-Feb	Late Mar-Apr	Apr-May
7-8	Late Dec-Jan	Early Mar-Apr	Mar-Apr
9-10	Nov-Dec	Feb-Mar	Feb-Mar

Troubleshooting

Rolls drying out	Add water to jug bottom
Too wet/moldy	Increase ventilation, reduce water
Mix falling out	Re-roll with drier mix
No germination	Wait 8-12 weeks, check seed viability
Bands breaking	Replace monthly
Spindly seedlings	Move to sunnier spot
Rolls unrolling	Use 2 bands per roll
Jugs tipping	Weight with stones, group together

Key Measurements

Feed Bag Strips: 4-5" wide x 12-18" long • **Potting Mix:** 1/4" thick layer • **Seed Spacing:** 1/4" to 1" depending on size • **Roll Diameter:** 2-3" • **Water Level:** 1/4-1/2" in jug bottom • **Cut Line:** 5-6" from jug bottom

Pro Tips

Label everything! • Take photos • Group jugs for wind protection • Start with easy seeds (lettuce) • Make new rolls every 1-2 weeks • Use colored rubber bands to ID varieties • Keep a garden journal • Be patient - some seeds take 8-12 weeks