

Collecting and Spreading Milkweed Seeds

Adapted from: <https://empressofdirt.net/growing-milkweed-seed/>

Collecting Milkweed Seeds

These tips will help you collect milkweed seeds to sow your own plants. This is particularly helpful if you intend to forage for seeds.

Know your local laws. In some areas it is illegal to remove any natural materials from public or private property. If you don't have milkweed on your property, ask around and see if others may have some plants from which you can collect the seeds.

Grow diversely. Because milkweed plants tend to be clonal (closely related), it is worthwhile to collect seeds from several different areas for better germination rates and diversity. Trading with a friend is a good option.

Wear gloves. The sap of milkweed can be harmful to both skin and eyes.



LEFT: Milkweed seed pods not ready for harvesting seeds. RIGHT: Milkweed seed pods ready for seed harvesting.

Timing is everything. Milkweed seeds are not viable if collected too soon. You can be too early, but probably not too late. In the images (above), the first image shows immature green pods. These are not ready yet. The second image shows the pod wide open with the fluff and seeds. That's your time to collect seeds before the wind and rain disperse them.



The image (above) show a milkweed seed pod. The seeds are the little brown things sitting in the fluff. The part we see is actually the seed casing. The actual seeds are inside which are usually a creamy white color if they are still viable.

Seed Sowing Summary

- Before growing milkweed, find out the best varieties for your area, ensuring they are non-invasive.
- Collect milkweed seeds in late fall when the seed pods are brown and open or easy to pop open.
- Allow seeds to dry completely before storing them (if you plan to start the seeds indoors during the winter) and remove any fluff or plant material first.
- The seeds require several weeks of cold temperatures to germinate (stratification). This is done naturally if you put the seeds out in the fall. If you bring them indoors for winter planting, you'll need to put your seeds in the refrigerator to mimic being outside.
- Direct sow in fall or indoors in spring.

Outdoor Seed Sowing

- The perfect time to sow milkweed outdoors is right when nature does it: when fall weather is consistently cool but not yet freezing.
- Sow the seeds and cover with one-quarter inch of soil. Keep watered until the ground freezes.
- Mark your sowing area with tags so you don't mistake the germinating plants for weeds in spring.