

Chickering GROWS

THIS WEEK IN THE GARDEN

March 19, 2021

WHAT'S GROWING

We are excited to GROW with you!

ALL ABOUT SECTION

Knowledge is power!

TIP OF THE WEEK

Let's learn something NEW!

DIY PROJECT

Want to do a gardening project?



DOES FEBRUARY LIKE MARCH?

NO, BUT APRIL MAY



WHAT'S GROWING

We will be growing tomato and basil plants from seed to harvest. Together, we will learn the basics of planting, transplanting and harvesting, as well as seedball farming and companion planting! One of the joys of growing an edible garden is to share the fruits of your labor with those you love. There are so many benefits to growing your own food. We cannot wait to GROW with you!



ALL ABOUT: SEEDBALLS



Seedball farming is a form of seed dispersal, a human intervention into what is already happening in nature. It is an efficient way of deliberately dispersing seeds, but trying to work in harmony with nature, by being considerate of wildlife and natural habitats. Some farmers believe that tilling can be destructive to soil health as well as labor intensive. For others, tilling is not possible because of the terrain or location. This ancient farming technique is used to reseed hard to cultivate areas or as a fun way to plant flowers and edible crops.

Seedballs are a “whole habitat in a tiny clay ball”: a mixture of soil, clay and seeds. They contain multiple seeds, which ensures that those that germinate and survive will be the strongest and most likely to thrive. The seeds remain dormant until their environmental needs are met. The dried clay shell acts as a carrier for the seeds so they can be launched into inaccessible areas. The ball protects fragile seeds from drying out in the sun, getting eaten by animals, or being blown away by the wind. Seedballs retain moisture from the rain and contain nutrients and beneficial soil microbes which helps the seeds grow. This gives seeds an advantage in gardens, meadows, fields and naturalized areas.

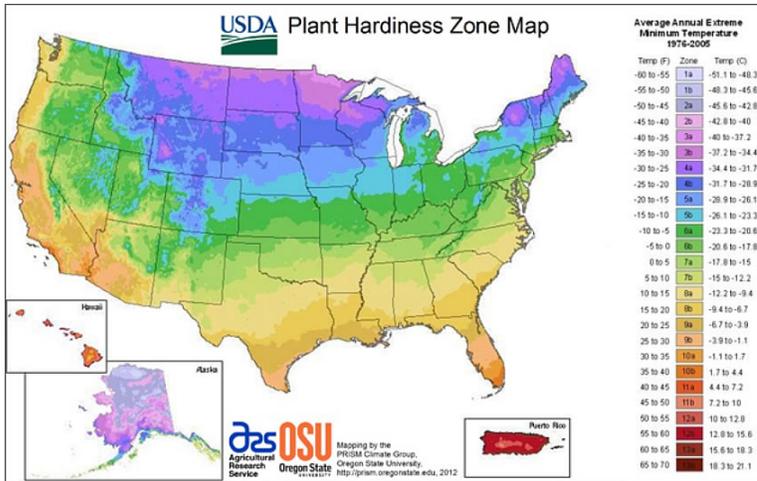
Seedballs have been used for thousands of years, especially in arid regions, because of their ability to keep seeds safe until conditions are favorable for germination, and the ease at which they can be distributed. In ancient Egypt, seedballs were used to seed the receding banks after the annual flooding of the Nile. Carolina rice plantations in the 1700’s used West African slaves to cultivate rice. Rice seeds were coated in clay, dried, and pressed into the mud flats with the heel of the foot. Japanese farmer and microbiologist, Masanobu Fukuoka, popularized the use of seedballs to help improve food production in post WWII Japan. He seeded riverbanks, roadsides and wasteland with vegetables. He also had the idea of launching seedballs by airplane which successfully “greened up” land all over the world.

Today, seedball farming continues to be used around the world. In India, seedballs are used to plant millions of trees and fight global warming. In Africa, they are used to plant grasses and millet in desertic regions. In Australia, seedballs are used to help regenerate Koala habitat. And in Europe and the United States, they are used to plant flowers for the bees and replant prairies after fires. Seedballs continue to be an important aspect of natural farming and conservation around the world.

To learn more, visit: <https://seed-balls.com>



TIP OF THE WEEK: HARDINESS ZONES



Timing is important in gardening, mainly because of temperature. We do not all live in the same climate zone. So, not everybody, everywhere, can plant everything on the same day. One thing to consider is the type of weather a particular plant likes. For example, some plants like potatoes really like the cold and do well. They are called “cool weather” crops. Other plants, like tomatoes, are warm weather lovers and do not even like a slight chill. These are called “warm weather” crops. How do you know when it is “warm” enough? And how do you know when it is safe to start planting warm weather crops?

There is a frost-free date in the spring that tells you when it is safe to start planting “warm weather” plants that do not like frost. There is also a first-frost date for fall that tells you when it is going to get too cold them to grow well. The number of days between these two is called the growing season. The USDA created a “zone” map that gives a special number to different “zones” or areas with similar growing conditions where a plant will be happy and “hardy.” This is called the **Plant Hardiness Zone map**. These zones are based on the coldest temperature an area tends to reach in the winter, separated by increments of 10 degrees Fahrenheit.

Dover is USDA Zone 6 which usually experiences a yearly low of -10 degrees Fahrenheit. It stretches in something like an arc, across the middle of the U.S. In the northeast, it runs from parts of Massachusetts down into Delaware. It stretches south and west through Ohio, Kentucky, Kansas, and even parts of New Mexico and Arizona before turning northwest up through Utah and Nevada, ending in Washington state! The growing season for Zone 6 typically begins in mid-April and continues through mid-November.

The Hardiness Zone is KEY to gardening. It is a great guide for timing when we start seeds to when we transplant them outdoors. The best time to start seeds indoors is 6 - 8 weeks before the last expected spring frost date. For example, if you start tomato and basil seeds indoors in mid-March, transplant outside in early May, you should anticipate an early harvest in June! Remember, the larger the fruit, the longer it remains on the vine to be harvested. For example, cherry tomatoes will be ready to pick long before beefsteak tomatoes!

Learn more at Gardening Know How: <https://www.gardeningknowhow.com>



DIY: MAKE YOUR OWN SEEDBALLS



Making seedballs are a great activity for all ages. It is fun, easy to do and can be easily adapted to the environmental needs of the community. You can choose the plants you want to grow! Flower seedballs can be annuals that bloom just once a year or they can be perennials, flowers that come back each year, or they can be a mix of both. Wildflower seedballs are a great way to plant local native species. These are especially beneficial for local pollinators and wildlife and will not disturb the local ecosystem if your seedballs take root in wild spaces. Herbs seedballs are good to add among your garden plants. Change the seeds to birdseed and you have the ingredients for a bird food garden. Turn a vacant lot into a wonderland of grasses, cosmos and zinnias. While it is fun to toss or throw the balls, they should not be tossed in others' gardens. If the seedballs are used to plant along roadsides, vacant lots or other areas, be sure to get permission and use native plant seeds. Let your imagination run wild! This recipe yields about 24 seedballs.

SEED CHOICE

- Choose native species for flowers and perennials that will grow successfully in your USDA Hardiness Zone. Be responsible: do not use seeds from invasive species. Use organic seeds from trusted sources.
- Less is more. You only want a few seeds to sprout from each seedball. Too many seeds mean too many sprouts, resulting in too much competition for nutrients and water.
- Choose seeds with similar needs to maximize success in their container or garden spot. Example: All annuals, all shade, all sun, all wildflowers.

MATERIALS

- 1 cup powdered clay or potter's clay
- ½ cup compost mix
- 2 tablespoons seeds
- Water

DIRECTIONS

- Mix the dry ingredients; add ½ cup water. Stir, judging the consistency.
- Roll a teaspoon-sized ball in your hands. Think “mud pie”. The ball should hold together when you squeeze it, without crumbling or dripping water.
- Roll the mixture into 1” balls. Let the balls dry on newspaper for a few days. Do not worry about smoothness. Rustic-looking seedballs are as interesting as marble-smooth. The color will change to terracotta as the balls dry.
- Simply toss your seedballs at a patch of dirt and watch them explode! Once they are watered or it rains, your seedballs have everything they need to grow.
- Seedballs make great gifts! Put them in a paper bag and staple directions on them or cut fabric and place a few seedballs in the center. Gather ends, tie with string, add a label and tie with a bow!



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VISIT OUR WEBSITE:

[HTTPS://WWW.DOVERPTO.ORG/CHICKERING-GROWS](https://www.doverpto.org/chickering-grows)

ANY QUESTIONS? ASK US:

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