Creating a Milk Jug Greenhouse for Native Perennials

Winter gardening is a great way to overcome the gloominess that many people feel in the winter months. If you want a fun gardening project to do at home, try sowing native perennial seeds outside in a milk jug during the winter. Many native plant species require a period of cold, moist conditions to germinate. By early spring your seedlings will be ready to plant, providing beauty as well as habitat for butterflies, birds, and other wildlife!

Golden Alexanders (Zizia aurea) and Blue Flag Iris (Iris virginica shrevei) germinated from this milk jug greenhouse.

Directions to create your own milk jug greenhouse:
1. Using a gallon milk jug or a similar container, cut horizontally around the middle of the jug leaving a hinge just below the jug handle.
2. Poke holes in the bottom of the jug for water drainage and around the top for evaporation and airflow.
3. Fill the container with 3-4” of soil. Moisten the soil.
4. Plant native perennial seeds to the appropriate depth*. Be sure to label the container with the plant species. (*Planting depth varies with seed size. Many online native nurseries provide handy cultivation information including planting depth).
5. Tape the container shut around the cut and place it outside your house.
6. Check on the your greenhouse jug occasionally. Water on sunny days, if needed.
7. Once the weather warms in spring, remove the tape and leave the container slightly open so that the greenhouse does not overheat.
8. When the frost of winter has passed transplant the seedlings into your garden!

Labeled milk jug greenhouses, with caps removed for venting heat.

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1 Adapted from Madison County Master Gardner Association, Inc. http://www.madisoncountymastergardener.org/garden_articles4.htm