



## Practical Tips Cold Stratification for Seed Starting

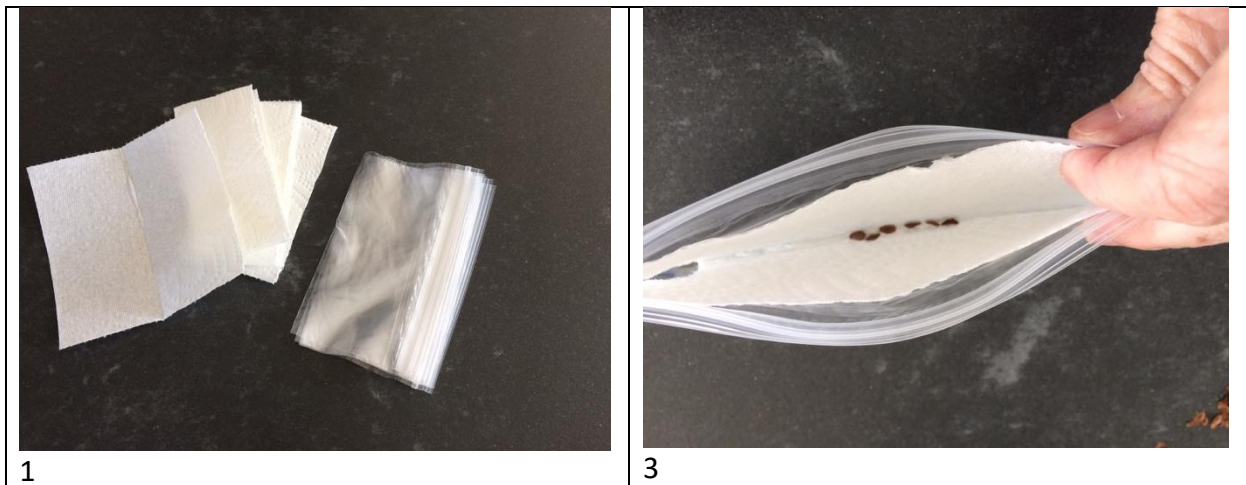


As you know, some seeds will germinate readily while others need to pass through the digestive tract of a bird or mammal before the seed coat is sufficiently softened. Some need scarification or nicking. Many of our native plants require a period of damp cold before the seed will break dormancy; most penstemons fall into this category. Many seed catalogs provide specific instructions for the seed offered. When in doubt, divide your seed and try more than one method.

The Plants of the Southwest [seed catalog](#) is a good source for germinating requirements of native plants. For example, they list 2 milkweed species: *Asclepias speciosa* and *A. tuberosa*. Instructions for both are “Sow in fall or cold stratify 1-2 months and sow in spring.” Prairie Moon Nursery offers *A. verticillata* with the [instructions](#) “Cold stratify 30 days.” They suggest fine sand as a germinating medium.

The [Alplains Catalog](#) is another good source for germination requirements by species.

**Cold Stratification:** A simple way to induce germination is to place seeds in a damp paper towel in a ziplock snack bag. Coffee filters work well, too. Moisten the seeds and refrigerate for the recommended time, checking occasionally for moisture level: the seeds should be kept moist but not too wet. After cold stratification, pot seeds in a sterile germinating mix and place on a sunny windowsill or under grow-lights. Occasionally seeds will germinate in the refrigerator.





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In a talk on starting native plants from seed David Salman recommended an overnight soak for all seeds in hot water (start at 170 degrees F) rather than simply moistening. He uses arroyo sand where I suggested a paper towel (above). I tried that method in 2021 and got very good germination rates. Don't put too many seeds in a bag because they are difficult to separate for transplanting after germination if they are too crowded. For *Penstemon* spp. check weekly after 6 weeks. Sometimes they sprout in the refrigerator.