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Launch a Wildflower Seed “Bomb” Campaign!

Seed “bombs”, (also known as “seed balls” or “garden grenades”), are a great way to introduce desirable plants into tough-to-reach areas. They are a mixture of a couple simple ingredients, molded into a ball and allowed to dry. The bombs are then launched into the targeted area, usually one that does not easily lend itself to more traditional sowing practices. The elements of the ball bind and nourish the seeds inside as it breaks down and is incorporated into the soil where it has landed.

The Ingredients:

Compost: provides nutrients and retains moisture, both of which are important if your seeds are going to get established and grow! If you’re buying compost, select an aged product that is pH balanced (neutral or slightly acidic). Coast of Maine compost meets these requirements and is a balance of materials. If using homemade compost, make sure it is an equal balance of green and brown elements, and at least one year old. Take the time to sift the compost or rub it through your fingers to break up any chunks or lumps.

Clay: acts as a binding agent, holding seeds and compost together when dried, then gradually crumbling when moisture is re-introduced after the bombs are launched. Red powder clay, available from a ceramics studio, works well and is easy to mix with compost. Recycled clay from pottery studios is cheap. You will need to pick out any plaster bits and make sure it is free of glaze (elements can be potentially toxic.). Hardened clay will need to be pounded back into powder, or close to it, in order to be reusable.

Seeds: To maximize the possibility of seeds’ getting established, use local seed sources and native species whenever possible. To avoid overcrowding of seedlings once they have germinated (or “sprouted”), add only a few seeds to each bomb. Try to put seeds with similar environmental needs together, and be aware of these

needs when you choose your launching target site (such as sun vs. shade, wet vs. dry soil).

The Recipe: Combine a ratio of 2 parts compost to 1 part clay. Use your hands to mix the two, breaking up clumps as you go. (Too much clay will cause the ball to dry very hard and will hinder breakdown in the environment, which is necessary for the seeds to establish themselves.)

Add JUST ENOUGH water for the mixture to hold together. A shallow baking dish or aluminum lasagna-type pan works well for mixing. Again, use your hands- they are the best mixing tools!

Once everything is kneaded together and mixed well, form into grape-sized balls. (Lots of resources say the smaller the better. Any smaller than a grape and it gets difficult to work the seeds in.) Select a few seeds and gently press them into the ball, then pinch the moist clay-compost media back over them.

Allow the balls to fully dry on a tray, piece of cardboard or layer of newspaper in a dry, well-ventilated area. Depending on the humidity of your environment, this may take a few days or up to a week.

Time to Launch! The best time to conduct your seed bombing depends upon when conditions are wet (but not freezing). In Maine, later fall is the ideal season as many perennial wildflowers need a pre-chilling, or a period of exposure to cold and moisture in order to get established for the following spring. The wetter weather allows the balls to break down before being blanketed by snow.

There are many, many resources and opinions as to what makes the best seed bombs. It is not an exact science. No one can predict nature's conditions (wind, rain, hungry and sharp-eyed birds, etc.). This guide is intended to provide one perspective on how to conduct a guerilla gardening project. Check out websites and online forums for more specifics. Have fun!