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Growing Lupine from Seed

Lupine seed has a hard coat as an adaptation to fire. As a result, the more severely you scarify the seed, the more successful germination is – as long as you don't overdo it. Here are a few approaches to try.

Winter Over

The easiest method to use, although not the most reliable. In the fall scatter the seed where you want them to grow the following spring and cover lightly with soil. This is the “Miss Rumphius” approach and works best for large numbers of seed.

Sandpaper

Take 10-20 seeds at a time and rub them between pieces of sandpaper, at least 10 times or more. Soak seeds in warm water 3 – 24 hours, inoculate with species specific inoculant, and plant in either a plug tray, a growing cube or a peat pot. Because of their tap roots lupine don't transplant well so use a method that will allow you to put them undisturbed into their final resting place. Hard seeds may come up the following year after being wintered over.

Grinder

One or two short (under 1 second) bursts in a coffee grinder is my most successful method and can be done with hundreds of seeds at once. Soak in water as above and for maximum germination put seeds in wet paper towel, place towel in zip-tight bag and lay the bag on top of a heating pad on low for 24-48 hours, or until the radical (first root) emerges. If you plant at this point you will have 80% or more germination.

Lupine are known as short-lived perennials, that means one plant will live 3-5 years and then often die. That is either because the plants get shaded causing their centers to rot or because the main roots die off and leave the side roots and seedlings to take over. While they may be the star of the perennial garden at first, their tendency to die off makes them best suited to a meadow environment. Once you have an established plant, you can help them along by scattering the seed when the pod has turned black.