

Seed Saving Fact Sheet



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Why save seeds?

Gardeners have been saving seeds for thousands of years, passing them from one generation to the next. Saving seeds ensures that we preserve the diversity of food crops available to us and for the future. By choosing to save seeds from fruits or vegetables with the best qualities, you can improve a variety or even create a new one! Collecting and saving your own seed is also a good way to save money. You can even sell your seeds or trade them with other gardeners.

What types of seeds can I save?

The easiest seeds to save come from plants whose flowers are self-pollinating or self-fertile. All of these seeds will produce plants and fruits just like the ones they came from:

- ❖ Beans
- ❖ Peas
- ❖ Tomatoes
- ❖ Peppers

Plants from the melon family contain both male and female flowers on the same plant. Pollination usually occurs by insects carrying pollen from the male to the female flowers. If each type of melon crop is grown separately, the seeds will bear the same fruit as the parent plants:

- ❖ Squash
- ❖ Zucchini
- ❖ Cucumbers
- ❖ Sweet melons

Most other vegetables have flowers that are either male or female and must be cross-pollinated with another of the same type of plant of the opposite gender. However, if there are other varieties of that same plant in the vicinity (i.e. many different types of lettuce) then the seeds produced will not produce the same kind of lettuce unless the different types are isolated from one another:

- ❖ Lettuce
- ❖ Spinach
- ❖ Broccoli
- ❖ Cauliflower
- ❖ Onions

When can I harvest my seeds?

Seeds should not be harvested until the fruits (in the case of tomatoes, peppers or melons) are very ripe. Beans, peas and corn should be allowed to dry on the plant before being harvested. Seeds from most flowers should also be allowed to dry before harvesting. Frosts will not damage most seeds so they can be harvested well into the fall or early winter.

“What are “hybrid” seeds?

Hybrid seeds come from a cross between two parent plants of the same species but of different varieties. This cross can happen accidentally, or, more commonly, it is done intentionally by seed companies to create plants with certain commercial qualities such as shelf life, uniformity, appearance, at the expense of other qualities such as taste and nutrition. Plants grown from hybrid seed will not produce seeds that can be collected and saved by gardeners as they are often sterile or do not produce plants that are “true to type”.

How should I store my seeds?

After seeds are completely dry, place them in a small envelope, or plastic or glass container and store them in a cool, dry and dark location. Carefully label all seeds so it is clear when they were harvested and what variety they are. Some seeds will remain viable for many years while others have a shorter shelf life.

More Information:

Seeds of Diversity is a national Canadian organization dedicated to preserving heritage seeds. Their web site address is www.seeds.ca