

Seed Saving - Quick Tips for Saving Your Garden Favorites

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Why Become a Seed Saver?

Seed saving is as old as gardening. There was a time when gardeners considered seed from their favorite plants to be treasures well worth saving from year to year. These days, seeds and seedlings are relatively inexpensive and there are new plants to try every year. So why be a seed saver?

Aside from the politics, capitalism and biotechnology arguments that are making the news, the bottom line reason for saving seeds is because you have a plant you love and want to grow again. It could be the perfect blue campanula, the best tasting tomato or a champion pumpkin. You never know when a seed company will discontinue your favorite seed to make way for new varieties. Saving your own seed is the only guarantee.

What Seeds Can Be Saved?

[Open Pollinated](#) or heirloom, self-pollinated plants are the only varieties that will grow true from seed, meaning the seedlings will be exactly like the parents. These are the seeds worth saving.

Seeds that have been [hybridized](#) will grow into a variety of plants with some characteristics of either or both parents. Many, if not most, of the plants being sold now are [hybrids](#). Hybridizing can create a plant with desirable traits and affords some job security for the seed company. Seed saving is not really an option with hybrids, unless you are looking to discover something new. You could however try [taking cuttings](#).

Additionally, plants that are pollinated by insects or the wind may have cross-pollinated with plants from another variety and again, will not grow true. To save seeds from these plants requires a bit of extra care, as explained below.

All that said, there are still many plants that will grow true from seed and saving and sharing these seeds has given birth to the seed savers phenomenon. Self-pollinated plants are the easiest to save and include: Beans, Chicory, Endive, Lettuce, Peas, [Tomatoes](#). You can also save many heirloom flower seeds such as: cleome, foxgloves, hollyhock, nasturtium, sweet pea, and zinnia.

Saving Seed from Plants that Cross Pollinate

To get pure seeds from plants that cross-pollinate with others in their species, you will need to physically separate the different species from one another. This can be accomplished by:

- Planting only one variety of a species.
- Planting different varieties at a distance from each other. Different plants require different distances and it can be substantial. Peppers require about 500 feet and squash plants would need a half mile.
- Plant varieties that flower at different times.
- Using a physical barrier, such as a row cover or bag. You would need to cover one variety at a time, so that each variety is allowed enough exposure time to be pollinated amongst its own kind.

Methods and Timing for Saving Seeds

Always choose the best quality plants, flowers, fruits and vegetables from which to save seeds. Look for disease resistance, vigor, great flavor and productivity. Next year's plants will only be as good as this year's seed.

Harvest seeds either:

- When the seed pods have dried on the plant (flowers, beans, broccoli, lettuce...)

Keep an eye on the pods as they start to brown. Most seed pods will open and disperse on their own. You can catch seed by placing small bags over the seed heads when they look ready to pop or by pulling the plant just before completely dry and storing upside down in a paper bag.

OR

- When the vegetable is fully ripe (Tomatoes, squash, peppers, eggplant...)

The vegetables will be well past their edible stage when the seeds are ready. For most vegetables you can simply scoop out and dry the seeds. Tomatoes require a wet processing method that is explained elsewhere.

Storing Saved Seed

- Make sure the seed is completely dry, or it will rot or mold in storage
- Remove as much of the chaff as possible
- Store in a paper envelope, labeled with the variety and year
- Place the envelopes into an air tight container, such as a canning jar
- Store in a cool, dark, dry place
- Stored seed is best used the following year

Seed saving can quickly become a hobby and you'll be in good company. There are many organizations, local and worldwide, that list and share their saved seed. Growing plants from seeds saved from your own garden, will, over the years, result in plants uniquely adapted to your garden. Think of it, seeds are probably the only heirloom that becomes more valuable with use!

SOURCE: <http://gardening.about.com/od/gardenmaintenance/a/SeedSaving.htm>