

# Seed Saving: Completing the Cycle



*Everyone's ancestors saved seed. As commercial seed companies are becoming increasingly consolidated into mega-corporations and as varieties of vegetables available to our grandparents are rapidly disappearing, it is time to reclaim this important step of sustainable gardening. By saving our own seed we can select seed for chosen traits, adapt plants to our unique climate, save money, protect heirlooms and become more connected to the full cycle of our gardens. Below is a quick look at some tips to help you be a successful seed saver.*

## **What are some things that I should consider before beginning to save seeds?**

Some things that must be thought about are the plant's method of pollination and if it will be crossed with nearby plants, the time of seed bearing, the special information of growing certain crops for seed.

## **Are there plants that shouldn't be saved?**

Seed from hybrid plants will not reproduce true to the parent plants. These seeds should not be saved.

## **What are the methods of pollination for plants?**

Pollen can be air-borne, insect-borne or can be self pollinated. Some varieties need to be separated by large distance or care must be taken to ensure that plants are not cross-pollinated (utilize alternate day covering or plant staggered). Remember that plants that are related can pollinate each other too.

## **How do you pick which plants to save from?**

Observe your plants throughout the growing season. Choose disease-free plants that have the qualities you like. Some qualities to consider include: flavor, plant size, harvest time, bolting time, fruiting abundance, yield, resistance to pests, and early bearing.

## **Which Seeds are good to save?**

Seeds must be mature if they are going to germinate. They are mature when flowers/pods are faded and dry. In the case of fruiting bodies, a good rule of thumb is that when they are ripe or over ripe the seeds are ready to be collected.

## **What plants should I start with?**

Some examples of plants that are good to start with include: beans, peas, tomatoes, lettuce and peppers. Self-pollinated crops are the easiest to do for a small gardener.

## **How do I get out the seeds?**

For 'dry' seeds - Leave flowers or pods on the plant until maturity. The drying process can be completed by spreading the seeds out in a ventilated, dry place. Remove any remaining chaff.

For seeds in fleshy fruit - Scoop out seed masses and mix in a bucket with warm water. Let the mixture sit and ferment for a few days, stirring daily. The fermentation kills viruses and separates the good seed from the bad (good at the bottom). Rinse and lay out to dry on a plate.

### **How do I store the seeds?**

Stored seeds must be dry. Put in a freezer for a couple days to kill pests. Store seeds in a jar or envelope with a label in a cool, dry place.

### **Are there other things that I should do?**

Take notes so you can remember why you saved those particular seeds. Record date of harvest, source of seed and variety traits. Refer to the following sources for more information.



Seed Saving technique books:

Seed to Seed: Seed Saving Techniques for the Vegetable Gardener. Suzanne Ashworth. Seed saver Publications Decorah, Iowa 1991.

Back garden Seed Saving: Keeping our vegetable heritage alive. Sue Stickland. Eco-logic Books, Bristol England.

Saving Seeds: the gardener's guide to growing and storing vegetable and flower seeds. Marc Rogers. Storey Publishing, North Adams, MA.

Breed Your Own Vegetable Varieties: Purple Peas and other innovations from the backyard garden. Carol Deppe . Little, Brown & Co., Boston 1993

[www.seedsavers.org](http://www.seedsavers.org) Seed Savers Exchange 3076 N. Winn Rd., Decorah IA, 52101

[www.seeds.ca](http://www.seeds.ca) Seeds of Diversity Toronto Canada

[www.calgefree.org](http://www.calgefree.org) Californians for GE Free Agriculture

