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ecology center

How to Save Seeds

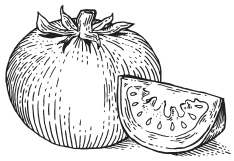
An Absolute Beginner's Guide

seed saving for beginners

factsheet

Why save seeds?

Saving seeds helps you and your community:



- Save money
- Increase food access
- Encourage ecosystem stability
- Protect and preserve pollinators
- Increase self-reliance and resiliency
- Grow more delicious, fresh, healthy food
- Preserve and increase vital seed diversity
- Adapt plants to the local, changing climate
- Maintain cultural history of culinary and agricultural traditions

Where do I start?

1. Start by picking plants that are *self-pollinating*. This means the plant fertilizes itself, and the seeds it produces will reliably grow to be the same as the parent plant.

Self-pollinating plants include:

- Beans and peas (*Fabaceae* or *Leguminosae*)
- Tomatoes (*Solanaceae*)
- Lettuce and artichoke (*Asteraceae* or *Compositae*)

Since plants in the same families reproduce the same way, other plants in the families above will also be self-pollinating and easy to save.

Look for *open-pollinated* or *heirloom seeds* whose genetic and physical qualities are relatively stable. Make sure these seeds are not crossbred with other types of plants. If seeds are labeled hybrid, F1, or VF, they are *hybrid seeds.* They will not produce the parent plant and may not produce anything at all.

2. Once you have grown and/or selected your plants, pick the ones you like most and that look the most healthy – delicious, resistant to pests, good size, shape, texture, and color.

- Be sure to record the traits of the plant you are saving, including name, type, date planted and harvested, location grown, and key traits.
  The more information the better!
- If you can, save seeds from multiple plants (eg. six of the best Green Zebra tomatoes, from different plants).

Seed Saving for Absolute Beginners (continued)

How do I get the seeds out and store them?

1. For dry seeds – like those in flowers or bean pods – leave them on the plant until maturity.
    - Wait until they are dry on the stalk (beans) or have already flowered (lettuce).
    - Remove seeds once plants are mature and spread them out in a ventilated, dry place.
    - Remove any remaining plant matter.

2. For seeds in fleshy, wet fruit like tomatoes, wait until plant is very ripe or overripe.
    - Scoop out the mass of seeds and mix in a bucket with warm water.
    - Let the mixture sit and ferment for a few days, mixing daily. The fermentation process kills viruses and separates the good seeds (which will settle to the bottom) from the bad seeds (which will float at the top).
    - If mold forms, pour off mold, floating seeds, and pulp.
    - Rinse and lay out to dry in a well-ventilated area.

3. Store the seeds you've saved! Put dried seeds in a container in the freezer for a few days to kill any remaining pests. Store labeled seeds in a cool, dry place in a jar or envelope.

4. For Jerusalem artichokes (*Asteraceae*) and potatoes (*Solanaceae*), plant the tuber instead of seed.

Other plants in self-pollinating families that are easiest to save:

Nightshade Family
(Solanaceae):
- cape gooseberry
- ground cherry
- tomatillo
- tomato

Aster, Daisy, or Sunflower Family
(Asteraceae or Compositae):
- artichoke
- cardoon
- endive
- lettuce
- salsify
- shungiku
- sunfower

Pea, Bean, Legume, or Pulse Family
(Fabaceae or Leguminosae):
- bean
- pea
- soybean

Other Resources:

For more details on starting your seed saving journey, and for specific guides for each plant, visit seedsavers.org/learn.

Ready for the next step? See *How To Save Seeds: A Guide for Experienced Seed Savers*, or visit our sister library's website: RichmondGrowsSeeds.org

12/2019