

### **TIPS FOR SAVING SEEDS**

Saving and exchanging seeds is a pleasurable activity that offers a sense of self-sufficiency. You can save some money at the same time. The gardener can participate in an interesting adventure; maintain plant varieties that are not commercially available; improve and refine certain plant varieties to better your locality; share favorite plants with other gardeners.

### **COLLECTING SEEDS**

As a starting point, you can select seed from several superior plants to maintain a broad genetic base. For example, one can maintain a variety that is not available commercially. So-called, "heirloom" vegetables often have inbred disease and pest resistance, as well as cold hardiness. Trading seeds can lead you to varieties that are not available through other sources. There are certain considerations that should be kept in mind when saving seeds.

Seeds from open and self-pollinated varieties of flowers, herbs and vegetables will produce offspring true to the parent generation; hybrids are risky as they will produce a mixture of plant types, most of which will be of poorer quality than the parent. Sometimes bizarre results come about when attempting to save cross-pollinated seed.

Hybrid tomatoes, beans and peas are an exception, since they pollinate themselves before their blooms open. Other common self-pollinating annual plants include lettuce and herbs.

Seeds of many flowers, herbs and vegetables should be collected when "rattle dry." This means they should be nearly ready to fall to the ground. In fact, you may need to place a sheet under the plants to catch the seeds as they fall. Check your plants each day as seeds mature, collecting a few seeds each day, as they are ready.

The seeds of some fruiting plants, such as cucumbers, tomatoes, and peppers, need to be harvested when the fruits are over-ripe. Melon, pumpkin and summer and winter squash seeds may be collected when you harvest them to eat. Allow eggplant fruit to fully mature on the plant before removing for the seed.

### **DRYING SEEDS**

Spread collected seeds out on a tray or aluminum pie pan to dry in the sun for several days to a week. Seeds should be completely dry before storing! Remove seeds from fruiting plants such as squash, melons, cucumbers, peppers and eggplant before drying in the sun. Stir the seeds at least once each day while they are drying.

Tomatoes are an exception. Dry tomato seeds according to following instructions:

Mash several fruit into a quart Mason jar or other clear glass container and add 1 to two cups of water. Set the container in the sun and stir at least once each day for 4 or 5 days. Allow the mixture to ferment. The debris will float to the top, while most of the viable seeds will sink to the bottom. This fermentation process destroys any bacterial canker disease organisms. Remove the debris floating on the top, drain off the water, and spread the seeds out on a tray and set in the sun (80°-100°F) for 4 to 5 days to dry. Stir at least once each day for even drying.

Saving Beans and Peas: Allow seed pods to turn brown on the plant. Harvest pods, dry for one to two weeks, shell, and store in a dry environment, in a paper bag.

Saving Lettuce Seeds: Cut off seed stalks when fluffy in appearance, just before all the seeds are completely dried. Seeds will fall off the stalk and be lost if allowed to mature on the plant. Finish drying the harvested seed stalks: shake seeds off, and store in a cool dry environment, in an envelope or small glass jar.

Saving Herb Seeds: Herbs vary in the way their seeds are produced. In general, allow herb seeds to dry on the plants until they are almost completely dry. Some seed heads, such as dill, will shatter and drop their seeds as soon as they are dry. Watch the early ripening seeds; if they tend to fall off, harvest the other seed heads before they get to that point, leaving several inches of stem attached. Hang several stems upside down. Cover with a paper bag to catch falling seed. Store in a warm, dry place until the drying is complete. Remove seeds from the seed heads and store in envelopes or small glass jars. Some herb seeds such as dill, celery, anise, cumin and others are used for flavoring and are ready to use once dry.

### **OTHER SEED STORING HINTS**

Seed should be stored at 40°- 45° F with 50% or less humidity. To create the best environment, place seeds in a glass jar with either an equal amount (by weight) of silica gel or *freshly opened* powdered milk. Set the closed container of seeds (with powdered milk or silica gel) on the kitchen counter for several days and check often for moisture condensation inside the jar. When the moisture no longer condenses on the inside of the jar, place in a refrigerator. For longer storage periods, place in the freezer. Seed must be dried with silica gel before freezing. Be sure to clearly mark your containers with waterproof ink.

To test for germination, sprout a few seeds between moist paper towels; if germination is low, either discard the seeds or plant enough extra to give the desired number of plants.

### **SPECIAL NOTES**

Squashes, cucumbers, melons and gourds must be artificially pollinated to avoid cross-pollination between different varieties.

Select several male and female flowers and cover with a heavy paper bag the evening before they are due to open. Tie shut and label the bags containing female flowers with a "F." The next morning, pick one of the covered male flowers and remove its petals. Uncover a female flower and remove its petals. Gently rub the stamens (male) against the stigma (female). Recover the female flower and leave about 4 days. Tie a bright ribbon loosely around the artificially pollinated flower head so the correct fruit can be identified at harvest time. It is not recommended to save seed from carrots or the brassicas as the carrots readily cross-pollinate with Queen Anne's lace and the brassicas do the same with wild mustard.

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