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A close-up photograph of a hand holding a single yellow seed over a mound of dark soil. The background is blurred, showing more soil and some green plants. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent purple filter.

SAVING SEEDS

Saving seeds is a great way to make sure you can maintain your garden sustainably for years to come. Rather than buying new seeds each year, you can collect seeds from your plants to sow the following season. Saving seeds is easier than you might imagine.

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WHY SAVING SEEDS IS A GOOD IDEA



Seeds are an important part of our farming and gardening heritage as well as being important for our continued food security in the face of global environmental and social threats. It is vital that we preserve seeds. In the 20th Century we already lost 75% of the diversity of our agricultural crops. Seed saving schemes have already gone some way to stemming the tide but more must be done. You can do your part by saving seeds in your own garden.

Of course, saving seeds will also save you money. You will not need to purchase new seeds each year. What is more, saving your own seeds will help you, over time, to create new plants that are better and better suited to where you live.

GENERAL TIPS FOR SAVING SEEDS

- > Save seeds only from heritage or heirloom plants – hybrids will not come true from seed.
- > Pollination is essential for viable seeds. Attract pollinators to your garden to ensure you can collect good seeds from insect pollinated varieties.
- > Take seeds only from your best, healthiest plants.
- > Do not collect seeds from plants that may have cross-pollinated with others of the same family – or the results may be unpredictable.
- > Store seeds carefully before they are replanted.

A close-up photograph of a pair of hands cupped together, holding a large quantity of bean seeds. The seeds are diverse in color and pattern, including solid white, solid pink, and various speckled patterns in shades of pink, purple, and white. The hands are positioned in the center of the frame, with the fingers slightly curled. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light color. The entire image is framed by a solid purple border at the top and bottom, with a wavy, organic shape separating the purple from the central image.

SAVING SEEDS IN A COOL CLIMATE GARDEN

Saving Pea & Bean Seeds

Peas are also definitely to be counted amongst the easiest seeds to collect. Peas rarely face any problems with cross pollination and plants grown from seed will usually 'come true' – ie, they will be the same as the parent plant. Peas for seeds can be harvested when the pods become fully brown and dry. This will usually happen around four weeks after the peas were mature and ready for harvest. It is a good idea to allow some of the pea pods from your best and healthiest plants mature to provide seed for next year. Simply remove the pods and store the seeds.



Placing dry seeds in a jar with some rice will help them remain dry and viable until you want to plant them out.

Beans will all be great for saving as seeds. As with the peas, you simply need to leave some of the beans on your best plants to mature fully and turn brown. The dried beans within the pods can be fully dried, stored and used later for food or kept and replanted the following year. Collecting the seeds from five or so plants is usually enough to maintain the genetic diversity needed for a healthy bean population. Bean seeds will usually be ready to collect for storage around six weeks after those beans were ready to eat. If frost threatens before they are ready, you can take a whole plant up by the roots and hang it upside down in a frost free place to allow the seeds to mature fully.

Saving Seeds From Radishes

Radishes grow quickly and will tolerate a wide range of conditions. What is more, letting radishes go to seed will provide you with a prolific secondary crop. Before you collect the seeds, you can also harvest a great many radish seed pods from each plant. Each radish only produces one bulb but you can get hundreds of seed pods from one plant. These seed pods are crisp and delicious, with a slight radish bite, and are great in salads and stir fries.



Leaving some of the pods to fully mature and dry on the plant will allow seeds to form fully. When the pods are brittle and dry, simply open each one and remove the seeds. Allow these seeds to dry fully on a piece of kitchen paper before storing them for use next year. The seeds are fairly large and easy to handle.

Saving Seeds From Lettuce

After blooming, lettuce seeds will take somewhere in the region of twelve to twenty four days to get to the point where the seeds are ripe. There are various ways to collect lettuce seeds. One of the simplest ways is to wait until the lettuce seed heads are drying out but have not quite dried out entirely. You should they take each plant and hang it upside down in a dry, cool place in a paper bag for a couple of weeks to dry out fully. Seeds, along with the chaff and some debris, will fall into the bottom of the bag. This method ensures that you do not leave the seed heads too long and end up losing most of them in a strong breeze one day.

After you have collected the dried seeds and chaff, place them in a large bowl. Separate the seeds from any larger plant pieces. Winnow the seed by gently swirling the bowl and blowing air over the pile of seed and chaff. The lighter chaff will be separated and can be blown out of the bowl. If there is lots of dust in with the seed then you can shake it gently over a fine sieve. Continue to process until the seeds are left with very little other plant material. Once this is done then you can simply label and package the seeds and store them with any other seeds you have.

Saving Seeds From Brassica and Other Leafy Greens

Leave broccoli, kale, cabbage, turnips and other members of the Brassica family in the ground until they flower. (Some will take longer than others to do so. For example, turnips should be left in the soil over winter – well mulched – and will flower the following spring.) Brassica can cross-pollinate so grow onto one variety to flower each year.

Once seed pods form, allow these to dry and seeds to mature on the plants. Once seeds are mature, you can open the pods to see the small brown seeds, which can then be fully dried for storage.

Saving Seeds From Beetroot & Chard



Beetroot, chard and other related plants can also be left in the ground until they flower and form seed stalks. Knobbly clusters of seeds can be found on each stalk. These can be left to mature and dry on the plants. They can then be rubbed from the stalks, fully dried and stored for replanting the following year.

Saving Seeds From Carrots & Parsnips

Carrots and parsnips are biennial and will not flower and set seed until their second year. You will have to sacrifice the roots from your best samples in order to collect some seeds. Roots can be kept in the ground over winter if given protection, or can be stored in wet sand and replanted to flower the following year if harsh weather is expected.

Once they flower the following year, these roots will develop seed heads. These should be allowed to fully mature on the plants. Once they begin to brown and dry, carefully cut them off and put them in a paper bag, as with lettuce seeds. Thoroughly dry seeds and then store them carefully, to use within a couple of years.

Saving Seeds From Onions

Leave onions in the ground for two years and allow them to flower. Wait for the seed heads, or umbels, to dry before cutting them off. Separate the dry seeds from the stems and other elements of the seed heads and once these are fully dried, you can store these for replanting.

Saving Seed Potatoes



The tubers of potato plants, its edible crop, can also be stored and used as seed stock for the following year's potato crop. Take some tubers from your best plants and store these well in a dark place over the winter. Early the next year, leave these seed potatoes to 'chit' or develop green shoots, in a cool, light place. Once the chits have formed, you can sow these potatoes to grow more potato plants.

Saving Seeds From Tomatoes

When your tomatoes are very ripe, cut them from the plant and clean them thoroughly. Then, cut each one open and scoop out the seeds and the pulp. Place the seeds and pulp into a container with a lid – a glass jar is ideal. You will notice that the seeds are coated in a sort of jelly-like substance. The next stage of the process is fermentation. Fermentation is the way to remove that gelatinous coating from the seeds, along with germination inhibitors and other contaminants. It may also get rid of some seed-borne diseases.



Pour water in with the seeds in the jar. After a few days, a mould will begin to form. This will begin to break down the coating around the seeds. When the mould has formed, tip your seeds out of the jar and rinse them thoroughly with cold water to remove all the mould.

You can then leave your seeds out to dry. When the seeds are thoroughly dry you can then store them in a cool, dark, dry place. Well stored tomato seeds can be viable for up to six years.

Saving Seeds From Courgettes, Squash & Pumpkins



The seeds from courgettes that have matured into marrows, squash and pumpkins are all relatively easy to collect. However, it is important to note that many such crops are hybrid varieties and will not come true from seed, and cross-pollination can be an issue.

Presuming cross-pollination has not occurred, take seeds from healthy specimens. Seeds from squash and pumpkins can be delicious roasted – but save some aside, rinse them, and leave them to dry thoroughly spread out in a thin layer on a paper towel or mesh rack before storing them carefully to replant the following year.



SAVING SEEDS IN A WARM CLIMATE GARDEN

In a warm climate garden, you are likely to also be growing a number of the plants mentioned above and can save your seeds in just the same way. You may also be growing some of the items on the list below. Here is how to save seeds from some of the other common warm climate crops:

Saving Slips from Sweet Potatoes

When you harvest your sweet potatoes, save back some excellent tubers to save as 'seed' for the following year's crop. Choose sweet potatoes from healthy, productive vines, without 'rat tail' roots. Each of these seed sweet potatoes will yield about six to ten 'slips' or green shoots that can be used to replant.

Store sweet potatoes carefully in a dark place over winter and then provide an environment of 75-85 degrees and 90% humidity for sprouting, which will take around 4 weeks. Slips can then be removed from the tuber and planted out to form your new sweet potato vines.



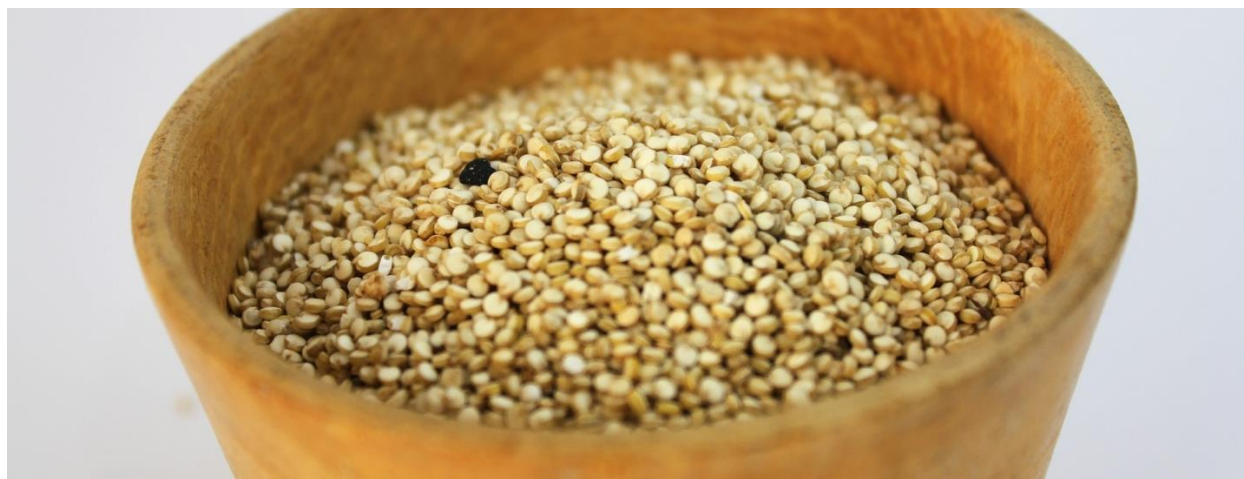
Saving Seeds from Sweetcorn



When harvesting sweetcorn cobs for eating, leave some of your best specimens on the plant. Wait for the ear husks to begin to dry and turn brown. Harvest the cob on a dry day thereafter. Peel back the husks to expose the kernels and hang in a dry place. Check after three months or so to make sure no mould has formed, and none of the kernels are diseased or have gone bad.

Twist off the dried, wrinkled kernels and store your seeds carefully for replanting.

Saving Seeds from Amaranth



If you rub amaranth flowers between your hands and lots of seeds are released, it is time to collect your seeds. Leaving it too late to collect your seed can be a problem, as too many seeds can be lost to wildlife or dispersal.

Strip flower/seeds off your plants while these are still relatively damp and not too dried out. Use a riddle (sieve) to separate the seeds from the rest. Let the seed dry out for a few days, then pour from a height in a breeze to disperse the chaff. Leave the clean seed to dry thoroughly before storing it for use in your kitchen or for replanting the following year.

Saving Seeds from Tomatillos

Seeds from your tomatillos are ready to collect when the fruits have filled their paper lanterns and the paper is dry and has begun to split at the base. Remove fruits from their wrappers and blend them. Pour the mixture into jars and viable seeds will sink to the bottom. Pour off the rest, leaving seeds at the bottom.



Add water to the jar, and pour off again, repeating until you are left with just the viable seeds in a little clear water. Drain, and pour out the seeds onto a paper towel or thin cloth to dry. Let them dry thoroughly and then store them for replanting.

Saving Seeds from Cucumbers & Other Cucurbits

Cucumbers can easily cross-pollinate with other cucurbits, and are often hybrid varieties, so these things are important considerations. To save heritage cucumber seeds, however, you should follow the same process as for tomato seeds, described earlier in this guide. The process of fermentation is required to make sure that the coating that prevents seeds from germinating is removed before the seeds are stored for replanting.



Saving Seeds from Peppers



Pepper seeds are one of the easier seeds to save. You can save the seeds from many different types of bell pepper and chilli pepper for replanting in your garden. If you are new to seed saving, then this is one of the great options to start with, along with other easy options like peas and beans.

Collect seeds from healthy, good quality peppers, setting aside any that look less than ideal. Dry these well in a warm area out of direct sunlight. Seeds are fully dry when they are quite brittle and do not dent when bitten. When dry, label and store your seeds for later use.

Saving Seeds from Okra



Okra seeds are also relatively easy to save. Allow the seed pods to fully dry on the vine and begin to crack or split. At that point, remove them from the plants by twisting them off. The seeds will come out easily and will be clean. They will not need to be washed and at this stage, can simply be stored to replant the following year.

Saving Seeds from Aubergines



Leave good quality aubergines from which you wish to save the seeds on the plants until they are hard and shrivelled. Slice open the fruits and separate the flesh from the seeds. Place the seeds in a bowl of water and wash away any pulp that clings to them. Strain the seeds, pat them dry, then spread them out to dry out fully before you store them for replanting.

These are just some of the fruits and vegetables that you might wish to save seeds from in your cool or warm climate garden. Of course, there are plenty of other crops to grow, and plenty of other seeds that you could collect. Why not make your gardening more sustainable and start saving your own seeds this year?