

## Saving Seeds

There are many reasons for saving your own seeds or seeds from your friends and relatives gardens. It is the politically correct thing to do as it helps conserve biodiversity of heirloom plants, and it can be cheaper than buying seeds. However the most important reason is that you want to grow plants that you love, or that provide history for you and your family.

## Choosing Seeds

The seeds you want to save are those that are heirloom open pollinated or self-pollinated plants that will grow true from seed (meaning the seedlings will be exactly like the parents). Many seeds available in stores have been hybridized (crossed between parents with different characteristics), and when the plants are open pollinated in your garden will have seeds that exhibit a variety of characteristics, not necessarily those you want. These might be fun to try if you want something new, but will not give reliable results. So when you are evaluating your garden for saving seeds, look at the origin of the plant and determine if you have an heirloom variety. Heirloom varieties are not commonly used in large-scale agriculture, and the seeds have been passed down from generation to generation and breed true from seed. A great resource for finding heirloom vegetable seeds is [The Heirloom Gardener's Assistant](#) which lists a variety of sources for ordering seeds. Some plants with heirloom varieties available include beans, chicory, endive, lettuce, peas, tomatoes, cleome, foxgloves, hollyhock, nasturtiums, sweet peas and zinnia. You will also need to plan ahead to some extent and make sure these plants cannot cross pollinate by wind or insects with other varieties of the same or similar species. You can do this by physically separating the plants, only growing the one heirloom variety you want to save, or planting varieties that flower at different times. Research to find the best way to isolate your heirlooms. Peppers for instance should be separated by at least 500 feet between varieties to ensure they are not cross pollinating.

## Harvest

Always choose the best quality seeds to save. The plants you grow next year will reflect the quality of the plants from this year, so you want to save the best seeds. Harvest the seeds when seed pods have dried on the plant or the vegetable is fully ripe. For seed pods, you can place a small bag over the seed head or pull the plant just before completely dry and store upside down in a paper bag. For vegetables, scoop out and dry the seeds when the vegetable is well past the edible stage, but before it rots. Tomatoes may require fermenting to remove the pulp which inhibits germination. Add water to a jar with the tomato seeds and set aside for a few days. After about 4-5 days when the fermentation process ends, the seeds will have sunk to the bottom of the jar and you can pour off the fermented material from the top. Spread the seeds on a paper towel to dry and then store.

## Storing Seeds

Make sure the seed is completely dry or it will rot or mold when stored. Gently rub the seed to get rid of any chaff. Store the seed in a labeled envelope in a cool, dry place. Be sure to label with variety and date collected. The seed will germinate best the following year, but some seeds will still germinate after several years of storage.

Germination rates usually decline more each year after collection, so it is best to collect seed every fall for planting the following spring.

When you have saved a few of your favorite seeds, you can have a lot of fun exchanging seeds with friends and neighbors, or saving seeds to pass down to your children and grandchildren of favorite plants from your garden. There are many organizations that sponsor seed exchanges, including Seed Savers Exchange where over a million seeds have been exchanged by gardeners all over the world. Have fun with this new endeavor!

## References

[Saving Seed](#), by J.E. Ellis and D. Whiting (03/08)

[Basic Seed Saving](#). International Seed Saving Institute

[Joyce Moore's Guide to Successful Seed Saving](#)

[Seed Savers Exchange](#)