



Saving Seed

If you are growing organic produce in your backyard, balcony, school or community garden, then growing 'from seed' and saving seed, has many advantages. There are various methods available to save, and store the seed from many of the fruit, herbs and vegetables you can grow.

Why save and grow from seed?

- It can save you money (instead of buying seedlings, or buying new seed all the time)
- An exciting wide range of unique varieties to choose from that you may not be able to source as seedlings
- Reduce negative impact associated with packaging, distribution and production of conventional seed or seedlings
- Save seed from produce that has grown well in the conditions of your garden, so it is acclimatised
- Protect and encourage genetic diversity, and avoiding the possible downfalls of monoculture
- Be prepared for possible food shortages or price rises, or food distribution issues, by knowing how to save and grow from seed
- It is satisfying and enjoyable hobby
- You can connect with other seed savers

What types of seed are best to save?

There are some seeds which are not ideal to save from year to year, such as hybrid seeds (i.e. F1), which are a cross between 2 plants, to get the 'best' from both, such as higher yield or disease resistance. The seed from these plants can be sterile, or highly variable if they do germinate.

However, seeds that you can buy, swap and save are:

- Heirloom or Heritage – genetically strong (the 'best' are saved each season) handed down from generation to generation, or a variety that has been around for a long time
- Open Pollinated – when pollination occurs naturally (plants self-pollinate or cross pollinate) not manipulated, they are more genetically diverse, may be adapted to local conditions, produce a dependable crop
- Organic – collected from chemical free plants, some may be certified organic



Saving Seed addresses the Permaculture Principals – Catch and Store Energy, Use and Value Diversity

Seeds contain all the information, and know-how, to transform into edible plants. By saving seed, we capture the energy, or essence, of the plant, stored and ready to use again as needed. Protecting biodiversity by saving and growing from a wide range of varieties is important to improve resilience and sustainability for our eco-systems and food industry.

What is cross-pollination when saving seed, and how can I avoid it?

Cross-pollination is where genetics have been shared between plants, during the pollination stage. If you grow from seed saved from that plant, it could negatively affect the 'next generation' by not growing true to type.

- Restrict what you grow of each species. If you grow *Brassica oleracea*, choose only one cultivar or variety (i.e. *Brassica oleracea Italica* which is broccoli, but don't also grow *Brassica oleracea Botrytis*, i.e. cauliflower). The genus can be the same, i.e. *Brassica rapa* (i.e. turnip) and *Brassica napus* (i.e. swede), without it affecting your broccoli seed.
- If you do grow more than one cultivar within a species, they need to be kept a certain distance from each other. That can be hard in an urban setting, and you may not know what is growing in your neighbourhood. Look into bagging, or caging and covering the plants, then hand pollinating them.
- Some species, such as bean, pea, tomato, and lettuce, self-pollinate before their flowers even open (as opposed to wind or insect pollinated) so cross-pollination is less likely to occur. These are great for beginner seed savers to start with.

How do I save the seed?

Choose plants and fruits with the best flavour, size, colour, disease and pest resistant, early bearing or late bolting etc.

For seed that are found in the edible 'fruit' part (such as squash, pumpkin, tomatoes, beans, cucumber), let the edible part grow beyond when

you would normally harvest, to ensure the seeds are mature. Remove the seed from the fleshy parts, rinse them in a sieve, and dry thoroughly on a plate or tray. Some produce (lettuce, basil, rocket, leek, carrots, beetroot) only form seed in the flower part, once the plant has 'bolted', or it has been let 'go to seed' (the plant grows until there are flowers and seed pods). Allow to dry on the plant, or pick and dry somewhere with low humidity, where you can observe the seeds. Label the seeds right from the start of the process.

How do I store my saved seed once fully dry?

- Dark, dry, cool & consistent temperatures, i.e. laundry cupboard, linen cupboard, fridge door
- Keep seeds in brown paper bags, small paper envelopes, recycled envelopes, clean small jars, or small plastic envelopes, labelled with date of collection and type of seed!
- Keep individual envelopes in containers/ box/ old filing box, in order of planting seasons

Where do I get seed from to start with?

- Look for seed swap groups in your area, or swap with your neighbours, family or friends
- Seed companies that specialise in heirloom and organic seeds in your region

References & Further Reading

The Plant Propagators Bible, Miranda Smith, 2007, Quarto Inc.

The Vegetable Gardeners Guide to Permaculture, Christopher Shein, 2013, Timber Press

www.seedsavers.net/seed-savers-handbook



For further information on this topic, contact

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