

Seed Saving

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With the growing season coming to an end, it's only natural to start thinking about how to save seed from your most precious produce. Seed saving is a practice that has been going on for thousands of years, dating back to some of the first agricultural-based human settlements. It's also a process necessary in reproducing successful plants from previous growing seasons.

Timing matters.

In general, it's best to start thinking about saving seeds towards the end of the growing season, when plants are starting to produce their last edible fruits. If you're planning to save



seeds from a fleshy fruit vegetable such as a pepper, eggplant, cucumber or squash, you

can wait until the fruit is slightly more mature than you would normally allow it to get before picking it. This will ensure that the seeds are fully developed and have enough energy stores to survive winter storage. For non-fruit bearing plants, it's important to make sure that you do not let the seeds dry out completely while they're still on the plant. Doing so will jeopardize shelf life and possibly diminish your ability to replant them next season. Some of the easiest vegetable seeds to save are beans, lettuce, peas, peppers and tomatoes- best to try if it is your first time seed saving.

What to look for.

In choosing seeds for saving, you should always look for the healthier-looking, disease free seeds. Waiting until the very end of the season is

important as well, since choosing an under ripe seed can jeopardize vitality when you replant. Seeds are usually fully mature when flowers have begun to fade and develop puffy tops, or pods have become brown and dried out. The seeds themselves often turn from white to a cream, or light



brown color when they are ripe.

Waiting is important, but waiting too long can allow for birds and other animals to devour the seeds, so be careful not to allow your seed crop to be completely eaten.

Drying.

Giving your seeds enough time to dry out, as well as preventing moisture from coming in contact with the seed during storage are two of the most important things to keep in mind when storing seeds. It can take up to a week of air-drying to ensure that the seeds are completely lacking in any moisture.

If you are storing seeds from a particularly wet fruit, such as a tomato, you will need to actually wet the seeds initially before you can store them. After removing the seeds from the fruit, place them in a container with warm water and let it

sit for two to four days. This fermenting process will help kill off viruses, causing the good seeds to fall to the bottom of the mixture, leaving the fruit pulp and bad seeds floating on top. Once you separate the good seeds from the rest of the mass, let the seeds dry on a screen or paper towel.

This drying step is important since moisture promotes seed germination, which is exactly what you want to avoid at this point.

Storing.

Once the seeds are fully dry, you can store them in glass jars, envelopes, or other containers that you see fit. Again, the most important thing is to make sure that the area and container in which you choose to store the seeds are kept dry. Also pay attention to the temperature of your storage space- warmth is another factor that promotes germination. Try to find a place that will remain relatively cool.

If you are planning on keeping seeds for a long period of time, it's recommended that you actually freeze the seeds. In this case, you should use a desiccant (drying agent) to make sure all the moisture is drawn out from the seeds. Some options are Drierite, silica gel, or even simply powdered milk wrapped in a tissue. You should place the desiccant of your choice in the jar with the seeds, and leave it for about a week. You

can then remove the desiccant and place the jar with the seeds into the freezer, which will keep for up to 5 years depending on the seed type.

When removing the frozen seeds from the freezer, make sure to let the jar reach room temperature before opening it. This will prevent condensation.

Some easy starters.

Below are some specific guidelines for the easiest vegetables to save seeds from, as mentioned above. Use the general guidelines along with the more specific ones below to figure out a method that works best for you!

Beans (and peas).

Most people tend to choose bean varieties for the strength of their pods,



and for home gardens, vine beans since they are more suitable for smaller spaces and can be better managed

during the onset of frost since they are off the ground. Regardless of the type of bean you want to save, these are the steps you should follow.

Collecting

Allow pods to dry to a brown color before harvesting, which is typically around 6 weeks after the eating stage (you should be able to hear the seeds rattling around inside of the pods when you shake them). If you cannot leave them outside because of frost, pull the entire plant (including the root) and hang the plant inside until brown.

Preparing

Remove seeds from their pods by hand, and separate seeds from chaff (other debris such as pieces of stems or leaves). Clean the remaining seeds by using air or a fan to again separate seeds from chaff. This process of cleaning seeds with the use of air is called winnowing.

Lettuce.

Collecting

Allow seeds to dry for two to three weeks after it flowers. It is usually difficult to harvest many heads at a time, since they all mature at different rates. Once you see that about half the flowers on the plant have gone to seed, cut the top of the plant and allow it to dry out. One suggestion is hanging it upside down over a paper bag (to catch the seeds as they dry out and fall).

Preparing

Usually shaking the heads works well enough to remove the seeds. Use a screen to help separate the seeds from chaff.

Peppers.

Collecting

The seeds are ready when the almost overripe peppers start to change color.

Preparing

Scrape seeds from the inside of the pepper, clean, and lay them out to dry before storing.

Tomatoes.

Collecting

Wait to collect seeds until fruits are fully ripe- if you need to pick tomatoes while they're still green to avoid frost damage, allow the fruits to ripen inside before collecting seeds.

Preparing

Remove the jelly-like center of the tomatoes that contains the seeds, and put it into a small container/jar with some water. Cover the container



loosely, and keep in a warm area. Fungus will form on the top of the container after three days, which will kill off diseases and destroy protective covering around seeds. When you start to see the fungus, fill the container with warm water and pour contents out- the immature seeds and pulp will be on the top, and the viable seeds will sink to the bottom. Repeat this process until the water in the container is clear, and you're left only with the seeds on the bottom. Use a strainer to finish off the cleaning process of the seeds for saving, and then let them dry out for a couple of days before storing.

Extra resources.

Give seed saving a try! For more information about specific seeds you are thinking about saving, to read up on how others are saving certain things and to find out more about seed saving in general check out these resources below.

<http://www.seedsavers.org/> <http://www.seedsave.org/>

Happy saving!