

Saving Seeds

What types of seeds should you save? When saving seeds, choose open-pollinated varieties rather than hybrids. If open-pollinated varieties self-pollinate or are cross-pollinated by other plants of the same variety, they set seeds which grow into plants that are still very similar to the parent plant. Open-pollinated varieties may be “heirloom” varieties that have been passed down from one generation of gardeners to the next, or they may be more recent selections.

We encourage people to start with what we’ve labeled as the “super easy” plants. These seed types are mostly self-pollinating and offer the beginning seed saver the best chance for successful seed saving.

Super Easy: These seeds can most reliably be saved by the home gardener, even if you’ve never saved seeds before.

Easy: Some plants are biennials, which means they produce seeds the second growing season. These are still suitable for some beginners. Many of these require large populations and isolation from things that could cross-pollinate with them.

Advanced: Some plants cross-pollinate; that means that if there is another variety around they can pollinate each other and the seeds you save will not be what you originally planted. These plants need to be isolated by large distances or hand-pollinated.

Seeds by Difficulty

Super Easy: Beans, Lettuce, Peas, Peppers, and Tomatoes.

Easy: Beets, Carrots, Chard, Herbs, Parsnips, Spinach, and Swiss Chard.

Advanced: Cauliflower, Broccoli, Brussel Sprouts, Cabbage, Corn, Cucumber, Kale, Melons, Onions, Pumpkins, Squash.

Harvesting Methods

Dry Seed Processing

Basil, Beans, Carrots, Onions, Peas, Peppers, and Spinach

Harvest dry seeds from their plants when their pods or husks have dried. Cleaning dry seeds involves simply drying and crumbling the pods or husks, then screening or winnowing the seeds to separate them from the chaff. Collect dry seeds under dry, warm conditions to prevent mold and reduce additional drying time.

Wet Seed Processing

Tomatoes, Cucumbers, Eggplant, Melons, and Squash

Allow the fruits to fully mature on their plants before harvesting. To clean wet seeds, scoop the seeds from the fruit, pulp and all. Pour the seeds and pulp into a container and add water. Healthy seeds will sink to the bottom of the bowl, while dead seeds and most of the pulp will float. Use your fingers to gently separate all the seeds from the pulp. Drain and lay the sunken seeds on a plate to dry.

Fermentation Processing

Cucumbers, Melons, Tomatoes

Highly recommended, fermentation removes germination-inhibiting substances from seed coats, makes them more permeable to water, and also helps reduce or control seed-borne diseases. Allow fruits to ripen fully and scoop out the seeds, along with the gel surrounding them. Put the seeds and gel in a glass jar with a small amount of water. Stir or swirl the mixture twice a day. Allow the seeds to sit in a warm area for 3 - 6 days. The mixture will ferment and the seeds should sink to the bottom within five days. Pour off the liquid, rinse the seeds and spread them out to dry on paper towels.

Storage

Store properly dried seeds in a moisture proof container. Small plastic bags, paper envelopes, or glass jars are all excellent choices. If using plastic bags, make sure to squeeze out all of the air. Keep seeds dry, dark and cool. Avoid light, and never store seeds in direct sunlight or a well-lit room. A temperature between 32° and 41°F is ideal, so your refrigerator can be a good place to store seeds. A small amount of silica-gel desiccant added to each container will absorb moisture from the air and help keep the seeds dry. Powdered milk can also be used as a desiccant. Use one to two tablespoons of milk powder from a freshly opened package. Wrap the powder in a piece of cheesecloth or a facial tissue and place it in the container with the seeds. Powdered milk will absorb excess moisture from the air for about six months. When you are ready to use your seeds, keep them in their closed storage container until the seeds come to room temperature. This will prevent unwanted condensation from settling on the seed packets.

Returning Your Harvested Seeds

After harvesting your seeds, please take steps to clean your seeds and remove as much chaff as possible. Be sure to dry them thoroughly and store them in a cool, dry, and dark place until you bring them back to the library. Please email info@eastaltonlibrary.org for more information.

Important- be sure to label your saved seeds with their name, seed type, variety, source and the sowing and harvesting dates.