

Seed Saving

A Primer

www.communitycrops.org



Why Save Seed?



Preservation:

Join the thousands of other gardeners and farmers who are working to preserve vital plant genetic heritage



Save Money:

By saving your own seed, you eliminate the need to purchase seeds from your local garden center or seed company next year!



Grow the Varieties You Want:

Seed companies often stop carrying varieties if they're not popular or if there's a failure in the seed crop. Make sure you can grow your favorite tomato by saving your own seeds!



Develop Regional Adaptation:

Seed grown by companies is selected to perform well across the entire country, not really any specific area. By continuously saving your own seed, you'll allow the crop to perform well in your particular climate, soil, environment!

The Basics



Choose Open Pollinated Varieties

Open pollinated varieties are plants that can be pollinated by natural mechanisms (i.e. not humans), and if separated from other varieties of the same species, the seed will remain true-to-type. Open pollinated plants are more genetically diverse, and thus more adaptable to local growing conditions.



Avoid Hybrid Varieties

Hybridized seed, commonly referred to as F1, is seed that has been purposely crossed and created to produce a certain trait. These varieties are often popular due to "hybrid vigor" a phenomenon in which hybridized plants produce prolifically. However, seed saved from hybrid varieties will not be true-to-type the next year...causing strangely shaped/formed fruit or plants.



Avoid Cross Pollination

Some open pollinated varieties can be prone to outbreeding (or being pollinated by other members of the same species), which will cause the plants to be untrue-to-type. Radishes, kales and spinach are examples of crops that tend to outbreed, while tomatoes, lettuce and peas are plants that tend to self pollinate, thus removing the need to isolate those plants. Protective barriers (physical or geographic) can prevent cross pollination.



Annual or Biennial?

Some plants take two years to produce seed and are known as biennial seed producers. These include beets, leeks and carrots. These crops often need to be dug up before a hard frost and kept in cold storage (root cellar, refrigerator etc) and then planted the next year. Maturity is reached during the first year, while seed development takes place in the second year.

Annual seed producers are plants that produce seeds within one growing season. Examples include: arugula, beans, melons, squash and tomatoes. Allow fruit / seed pods to fully ripen before harvesting seed



Difficult Producers

Several crops present particular challenges to the beginning gardener / farmer for seed saving. While it is possible, we'd recommend getting a little experience under your overalls before trying to save seed from the following crops: beets/chard, carrots, escarole, onions, endive, cabbage and broccoli.

Helpful Resources



Seed Savers Crop Specific Seed Saving Guide: Includes info on methods of pollination, life cycle, population needed and seed maturity. http://www.seedsavers.org/site/pdf/crop_chart.pdf



International Seed Saving Institute Glossary of Terms: A helpful definition of terms needed for full comprehension of seed saving and breeding. For beginners and experts alike. <http://www.seedsave.org/issi/904/glossary.html>



Vegetable Seed Saving Handbook: A step by step seed saving guide for common vegetables. <http://www.howtosaveseeds.com/seedsavingdetails.php>