

## SAVING SEEDS

Before the advent of all those colorful seed catalogs, gardeners commonly saved their own seeds for propagating next year's garden vegetables and flowers. Many home gardeners are now re-discovering the time-honored tradition of saving seeds.

There are a number of reasons why you may want to consider saving seeds. Saving seeds is a practical, inexpensive way to produce your own seeds for next season. Locally selected varieties are usually better suited to your garden and climate. Preserving and perpetuating plant varieties from one generation to another has saved many heirloom varieties from extinction. You can share or exchange seeds with other seed savers. Also, it's a fascinating and satisfying hobby.

It is important for a seed grower to understand the process of the plant he or she is raising for seed, as there are many variations on the theme of pollination. Most heirloom seed is produced as a result of open-pollination and can be replicated in successive years. By contrast, hybrid seed is a result of cross-pollination between two selected parents and cannot be replicated if open-pollinated. For this reason, plants resulting from hybrid seeds are not suitable subjects for seed saving. You will probably find it useful to refer to a book or other resource on seed saving for more information on specific plant varieties.

The novice seed-saver can begin by taking cues from Mother Nature. Observe the types of flowering plants that re-seed themselves freely in your garden or in vacant lots. Many garden annuals (such as alyssum, calendula, cosmos, marigold, sunflower, sweet pea, and zinnia) and wildflowers (such as California poppy, lupine, coreopsis, and clarkia) are good subjects for the beginning seed saver as they don't have complicated pollination requirements and they don't need special pampering.

Flag the individual plants you want to select seed from and continue to observe them until the seed ripens and matures - timing is very important. Collect the seed and allow it to dry out thoroughly before storing them. Seed that is not dry enough when stored will keep poorly and have a low percentage of germination.

Among vegetable seeds that are most easily saved are non-hybrid tomato, pepper, bean, and pea seeds. Collect seeds from fully mature, ripe fruit of these plants.

To save tomato seeds, squeeze the seeds from a fully ripe fruit onto paper towel or piece of screen. Leave the seeds at room temperature until they are fully dry.

Pepper seeds can be collected by selecting a mature pepper, preferably one that is turning red. Extract the seed and allow to dry as for tomato seed.

For beans, peas and other legumes, leave pods on the plant until they are dry and rattle when shaken. Pick the dry pods before they split and become scattered. When the pods are completely dry, remove the seed.

The ideal place to store your seeds is in the refrigerator or freezer. Keep the storage area as dry as possible. Label all containers with variety, date, and other pertinent information about the strain you are saving. If you keep seeds in envelopes, store them inside of another jar or sealed container.

*University of California Cooperative Extension Master Gardener Volunteers can provide additional gardening information upon request. Call the San Luis Obispo office at 781-5939 on Mondays and Thursdays from 1 to 5 PM. You may also call the Paso Robles office at 237-3100 on Wednesdays from 8 AM to 12 PM. The Paso Robles Library Master Gardener community outreach program is available to gardeners on Mondays from 10 AM to noon. The Master Gardener e-mail address is [mastergardener@co.slo.ca.us](mailto:mastergardener@co.slo.ca.us).*

*Submitted by Mary Bernard, Master Gardener*