

## SAVING SEEDS: PLAN FOR NEXT YEAR'S GARDEN NOW

This is the time of year that many flowers and vegetables are nearing the end of their growing season. It can be educational and fun to save the seed produced by these plants to reuse next growing season. Here are a few tips for saving seeds from your garden.

An important thing to remember about seed saving is that hybrid plants rarely come back true to type. This means that it is usually not possible to save seed from hybrid plants and get the same plant. Most likely you will get a mixture of plant characteristics that do not resemble the parent. One easy way to tell if a plant is a hybrid is simply to look at the seed package and make note when you plant.

Seeds can be saved from open-pollinated or heirloom type plants. These plants will retain the characteristics of the parent and have stable traits that transfer to each generation. Open pollinated plants and heirloom plants will usually be very similar-but not always the exact same.

It is important to choose good quality and healthy plants to save seed from. Seeds are grown either in pods or seedheads and plants will drop their seeds if we don't get to them before they are released. Seeds should be mature, which on flowers means it is important to wait until the flower parts are faded and dry. It is best to let the seed dry out as long as possible on the plant, but some indoor drying will also be needed to make sure the process is complete.

To collect seeds it is easiest to cut off spent flowers and pulverize them indoors to gain access to the seeds. It will take some effort to separate the seeds from the flower and clean them up. The seeds need to be as clean as possible since old petals or flower parts may mold and contribute to the degradation of the seed. Spread collected seeds on a screen, a flat surface or put them in a container in a well ventilated area to complete the drying process.

Many vegetable seeds from heirloom varieties can be saved as well. Bean, pea and other legume seeds are among the easiest to collect. The dried pods should be picked and placed in a ventilated area at room temperature. As soon as the pods are totally dried out the seed can be removed and stored.

Tomatoes require a different tactic. Pick the ripe fruit and squeeze the pulp (including seeds) into a container. Add water and let the mixture ferment (don't be alarmed by the fuzzy growths) for a few days at room temperature. Stir the container occasionally and after a few days the good seed will settle to the bottom, while the useless seed will float on the top. The fermentation will kill diseases and remove a germination inhibitor often present on tomato seeds. Drain off the fluid with the useless seeds and thoroughly dry the remainder of the seed before storage.

Peppers may be the easiest seed to harvest. Simply wait for the pepper to change color on the plant which indicates it's full ripeness. Cut the pepper and scrape the seeds out on a plate to dry, but remember to use a ceramic or glass plate to avoid sticking. Dry the seed until it breaks rather than bends.

Don't forget that some newer varieties of plants are protected by something called the Plant Variety Protection Act and seeds from these plants cannot be kept. Always check the label on the seed packet to be sure.