Basic Seed Saving Guide

Vegetable	When to Save	How to Save
Beans, Peas	When the pods have completely dried out on the plant and rattle when shaken.	Break open the dry pods to remove the seed. Let them set out to fully dry before storage. Beans and peas are self-pollinated.
Lettuce	After the lettuce bolts, flowers, and the flowers have dried out.	Collect the dried flowers in a bowl. Crush the plant material in the bowl with your hands. Gently blow the chaff away from the seeds. Lettuce is self-pollinated.
Pepper	Harvest seeds when peppers are fully ripe. Note: green peppers are unripe peppers, for viable seeds you must let them ripen until colored.	Remove the seeds from the pepper. Lay them out to dry. They are dry enough to store when the seeds break when bent. Peppers may be self- or insect pollinated. Be careful when hot peppers are grown near sweet peppers. Hot is the dominant trait, and sweet is recessive.
Radish	After the radish bolts, flowers, and the seed pods dry up. *Fun Fact*: You can also eat the green seed pods when they are still tender.	Collect the dried seed pods. Crush in a bowl with your hands. Gently blow the chaff away from the seeds. Radishes are cross-pollinated. There is potential to cross with mustard or other types of radish flowering at the same time.
Tomato	Harvest from fully ripened tomatoes. Squeeze the seeds out of the tomato.	Tomato seeds must be fermented to be viable. Mix the seeds with some water and let stand at room temperature for 3-4 days. Good seed will sink to the bottom. Lay them out to dry before storing. Tomatoes are self-pollinated. Many common varieties found today are hybrids produced by human intervention in the pollination process.

Why aren't melons, cucumbers, and squash listed here?

Melons, cucumbers, and squash are cross-pollinated plants that rely on insect pollination. Insects are likely to cross two different types of these plants. This can lead to an unpleasant surprise when the zucchini seeds you plant next year grow fruits that have the less palatable qualities of a pumpkin. For this reason, these require advanced seed saving skills. Many other vegetables are not listed here because they are biennial, meaning they do not produce seed until the second year of growth. If you are interested in advancing your seed saving skills, there are book recommendations below and options may be available at your local library.

Why save seeds?

- Health and empowerment. Gain control over your food supply by saving and growing your own seeds.
- Diversity. Saving seeds increases community access to varieties of food not available in stores.
- Preservation. Preserve food varieties, culture, and your own personal story in a collection of seeds.
- It's free and fun. You can choose the best plants from your garden and produce vigorous plants that over time are specially adapted to your own location.

Book Recommendations:

Ashworth, Suzanne. *Seed to Seed: Seed Saving and Growing Techniques for Vegetable Gardeners*, 2002.

Cohen, Bevin. *From Our Seeds and Their Keepers: A Collection of Stories*, 2018.

Weaver, William. *Heirloom Vegetable Gardening: A Master Gardener's Guide to Planting, Seed Saving, and Cultural History*, 1997.

Community farm

A project of Community Hospital Anderson Foundation

Basic Seed Saving Guide

Glossary

Bolt – To grow rapidly to produce seed. This is a term used to describe the process of lettuce, radishes, and other typically compact vegetable plants growing rapidly taller to produce flowers and set seed. Often when these plants start to bolt, the traditionally eaten parts get unpalatably more bitter or spicy.

Chaff – The broken plant pieces that are often mixed in with seeds while harvesting. Chaff can be made up of dried seed pods, stems, leaves, and other debris.

Cross-pollinated – When pollination occurs between different flowers, either from the same or different plant. Not self-pollinated.

Dominant trait – Genes that are expressed when present and result in observable traits. For example, green is a dominant trait in peas. If a green pea were cross-pollinated with a yellow pea, the resulting offspring will most likely be green.

Flower – The seed-producing part of a plant that contains all of the plant's reproductive organs.

Hybrid – Varieties that are the result of cross-pollination between genetically different parents. This can happen naturally or with human intervention. This is not the same as "genetic modification." The offspring of identical hybrids is not guaranteed to produce a plant identical to the parents. Not open-pollinated.

Insect pollination – When insects pollinate plants by carrying pollen from one flower to another. This is one way to achieve cross-pollination. Common in melons and squash.

Open-pollinated – Stable plant varieties that produce predictable offspring when genetically similar parents are cross-pollinated. Heirloom-type plants are open-pollinated. Not hybrid.

Pollen – The male genetic material of plants. Pollen is required to produce viable seed by fertilizing ovules inside the flower.

Pollinate/Pollination – The process of bringing pollen in contact with ovules to produce viable seed.

Recessive trait – Genes that are only expressed when the dominant trait is not present. For example, sweet peppers only result when the dominant spicy (capsaicin) gene is not present.

Self-pollinated – When a plant's flowers are able to pollinate themselves, usually before the flower even opens. Not cross-pollinated.

Thresh – The process of separating seeds from chaff.

Viable – Used to describe seeds that will germinate and produce a healthy plant. Seeds harvested too early will not be viable. Seeds stored for too long will lose viability, but length of acceptable storage time is dependent on the specific plant. For example, tomato seeds can remain viable for years, but onions seeds are typically viable for only one year.

Wind-pollination – When wind carries pollen from one flower to another. This is one way to achieve cross-pollination. Common in corn.

Winnow – The process of separating seeds from chaff (threshing) by blowing the light-weight chaff away from the heavier seeds. This can be achieved using your mouth, the wind, or fans.