

GPL / Seed Library 2022

End of Season: How to Harvest, Save and Store Seeds



Late Summer, Fall and early Winter is when harvesting and/or storage happens for most seeds.

The exception is the Brassica/Cruciferae type plants, such as cabbages, brussels sprouts, cauliflower, collards, kale, broccoli and carrots - which are a biennial seed plants and usually need to over winter to a second season in which they are ready to set their seeds.

These plants rely on pollinators -

bees, bugs, birds, butterflies - so when seeds are ready you'll want to either isolate an area to plant so that get the same plant crop next season, or you can plant these along with self-pollinators that won't cross pollinate with other plants.

OR... you could be adventurous and plant with other pollinator plants and be surprised at what cross pollinated plants evolve in your garden.

ITEMS NEEDED:

- Air tight containers for transporting seeds to Seed Library -clean collected and saved glass jars of various sizes with covers. Depending on size of seeds you could also use small to larger craft-like containers, plastic bags, paper envelopes.
- Labels - used on jars (or other containers used) so that you can date and name the seeds collected. **Be sure to only put one kind of seed in the final seed storage container.**
- Scissors or garden pruners
- Paper bags - larger and small
- Jar (s), bowls, paper plates, or a tray with higher sides
- Toothpick (s)
- Paper towels, parchment paper, sheets of white paper
- Thinner mesh screen box (fiberglass mesh doesn't rust) or kitchen strainers
- Spoon or something to use for gentle stirring
- Water

General Basics to Preserving Seeds

1. Harvest the seeds from the best plants you have...

Choose plants that are disease free and have the best looking flowers or the tastiest fruit/vegetables.

- Use the dry method with beans, peas, onions, corn and most flowers.
- Use the wet method for pumpkins, squashes, zucchini, tomatoes, cucumbers.

Most seeds are good to plant for the following 3 years, some up to 6 years - exceptions are parsley, sweet corn and onions must be planted following year.

2. Plants go to seed and are ready to harvest...

Simply let a plants' flowers go to seed. Think of a flower as a seed factory - because that's exactly what it is. Leave the spent flowers on the plant so it can set their seeds. Then, let the seeds completely dry on the plants. Don't pluck them off before they are dry. Even a little moisture in the seed could hamper it's maturity and cause mold to grow in storage.

3. Remove pods, seed heads, or capsules...

Clip seed heads, seed capsules or the seed pods, on a warm and dry day. It is best if the seeds are not 'dewey' or won't get wet before storing them. I usually wait until mid day to later afternoon when the sun has dried up any moisture on the seeds. Label the containers you put the seeds in - especially if you are harvesting different types of seeds. Keep seeds separate and in individual containers.

4. Storing Seeds...

Store the seed in a cool, dark, dry place such as a corner shelf in the garage, basement, closet, or in the back of a refrigerator. The ideal temperature for storing seeds is between 32°F and 50°F.

The rule of thumb for storing seeds is that the temperature and the humidity levels should add up to less than 100%. This means that if the temperature is 50°F, the humidity has to be less than 50%.

Both high humidity and high temperatures are catalysts for germination and will trigger the seeds' metabolism.

GPL / Seed Library - 2022 Featured Seeds

Heirloom Lemon Cuke Cucumber

Pick ripe cucumbers (will be softer and change a lighter green color, or yellow color). Scoop out pulp and seeds into jar of water, cover jar and save 3-4 days. You will see seeds at bottom- pulp and water above. Scoop out the pulp and pour out water and seeds into a strainer (or mesh box) and separate seeds from any leftover pulp. Put seed on a double piece of paper towel to dry completely - if needed nudging them a bit so they don't stick to paper towel. I usually transfer seeds to another surface for at least another day or two - to make sure they are dry. Put seeds in the storage container of choice and label with seed name and date.

Heirloom Alaska and Wando Peas

Self pollinators - which means they don't rely on pollinators - bees, bugs, butterflies - so you'll get the same sort of crop next season. Beans and peas really like the cooler weather so when the weather gets to the 80 degree mark or more they stop producing and are ready to start seed production. Leave your bean stalks to turn brown, dry out, and get 'crispy' and the leaves are crunchy. The pods will be discoloring and drying out too and you can pinch them off and put into a container.

Leave the pods to fully dry out... 3-5 days up to a couple of weeks. The pods are ready when you can feel that they are completely dry and when you shake them you hear a rattle of the beans inside of the pod. Crack

open the pods and let seeds drop into another container, or paper plate, or another open surface. They may still be a little damp so let them dry out completely. Then put in your final container - store in a cool, dry, dark spot.

Purple Plum Radish

Set aside some of these plants in spring to just go to seed. Radishes are an open-pollinated variety (needing pollinators) so be aware of the area in which you are wanting to plant these - you may want to isolate them. This plant grows in 3- 4 months in very warm sunny weather, shoots up stems - and has flowers that are white, pink or lavender. Then pods form and as they age they brown and dry on the plant. Cut the stem with the pods on using scissors or pruners, or just pluck individual pods with your fingers and put in container or paper bag. Crack and pull apart the pods. The seeds are usually on a thin filament so a toothpick helps to pry away seed. A plate or tray with sides is useful. Discard extra material/shaft and place in your compost container. Look at your seeds carefully and tilt plate to roll seeds to one side. Toss seeds that don't roll - as that means they aren't the best seeds and may not germinate. Let final good seeds out a day or two to make sure they are completely dry. Then put in your final container - store in a cool, dry, dark spot.

Heirloom Tomatoes: Atomic Grape and Cosmic Eclipse

Pick ripe tomatoes, wash, slice in half and squeeze tomato seeds into strainer to get rid of some of the tomato liquid. Can also scoop out pulp if tomato is larger. Put seeds into a glass jar filled about 1/3 - 1/2 with water, depending on how many seeds you have. Label jar with name of tomato. Set the jar in an undisturbed area without sun for 3-5 days. Shake jar gently - water will separate seed and pulp - scoop out pulp and strain water. Put seeds on paper towels, or parchment paper and let dry completely. Put your dry seeds in a final container - store in a cool, dry, dark spot.

Heirloom Lettuces: Speckled, Tennis Ball and Yedikule

Let your lettuce bolt - the leaves will start to taste bitter and the plant will shoot up stems. Flower heads will grow at the top. Once the flowers have withered and seed heads are fluffy you can cut off entire seed head. You can then squish each seed capsule over a plate or put the entire head in a paper bag and gently shake the seeds free. Then to separate further seed from the chaff pour contents of paper bag into strainer that is over a larger container. Make sure your seeds are completely dry and put in a final container - store in a cool, dry, dark spot.

Heirloom Basils: Genevese Red Freddy and Thai

Let your basil start to flower and set seed at the end of the growing season. At this time the leaves will slow down in growth and the flowers will develop seed, turn brown. You can pinch, or cut off the seed and stems over a paper plate. Then crush gently the small dry seed pods to release seeds. Put into a strainer to get rid of the other parts/chaff. Make sure your seeds are completely dry. Put in a final container - store in a cool, dry, dark spot.

Heirloom Parsley

The first year you should harvest the leaves, and second year harvest for seeds. Let the plant and seed heads dry out and turn brown. Cut or pinch off seed heads over paper plate, or bowl. Seeds are very small so be careful. Spread seeds over paper or paper towels and let dry for a week. Make sure your seeds are completely dry. Put in a final container - store in a cool, dry, dark spot.

Heirloom Spearmint

After the plants have finished blooming leave a few flowers on the plant until they turn brown. Cut flowers off and place in paper bag. Put in a cool dry place for 2 weeks to have them dry out. Make sure your seeds are completely dry.

Heirloom Garlic Chives

After flower withers and browns you'll see little seed pods. Cut off all the seed heads into a bowl. Gently crush outer pod to release seeds. Seed should be black and uniform in size. If seed falls apart it isn't a good seed so

don't save them. Put seeds in paper bag. Make sure your seeds are completely dry. Put in a final container - store in a cool, dry, dark spot.

Wisconsin Native Plant: Black Eyed Susan

Cut off seed heads of your plants. If still green lay them out over newsprint or parchment to dry out for 2-4 weeks. When completely dry - cut off stems, put into a bag or jar and give them a good shake. Discard the chaff and on paper towel or parchment to dry. Make sure your seeds are completely dry. Put in a final container - store in a cool, dry, dark spot.

Wisconsin Native Plant: Anise Hyssop

Do not remove more than 60% of this plant at any one time. Cut stems/stalks 2-3" from the ground and hang them upside down for drying. To save seeds remove flower spikes as they begin to turn brown and dry out. Spread them out on newsprint or parchment to further dry. Thresh them gently to remove seeds. Make sure your seeds are completely dry. Put in a final container - store in a cool, dry, dark spot.

Wisconsin Native Plant: Purple Prairie Clover

Strip the seed heads from their stalks with a bowl or container underneath to catch the seeds. The hulls may slow Spring germination so seeds may need to be scarified - which is a process to help weaken, open or alter the outer coating on seed to encourage germination. Make sure your seeds are completely dry. Put in a final container - store in a cool, dry, dark spot.

Wisconsin Native Plant: Hairy Beardtongue

When the capsules have formed and turned brown cut off seed heads. Then save, store and dry out in a paper bag for 1-2 weeks. Pinch the seeds heads with your fingers to get the seeds to pop out. Use a strainer to sift thru and remove chaff. Make sure your seeds are completely dry. Put in a final container - store in a cool, dry, dark spot.

Preserving Pumpkin and Other Squash Seeds

Cut pumpkin/squash open and scoop all of the seeds into a colander. Rinse the pulp from the seeds. You may want to soak seeds a couple hours to help remove the pulp. Rinse again in colander. Look through seeds and discard any damaged or very thin seeds. Put seeds on a cookie sheet lined with parchment paper and let dry in cooler dark area from 7 to 10 days - turn over once or twice in between. Put in a final container and leave open another week or so to make sure seeds are completely dry. Store in a cool, dry, dark spot.

Preserving Sunflower Seeds

Make sure to wait until sunflowers and stems are very brown and very dry from stem up thru leaves and seed heads. Cut flower heads off and put into a paper bag and shake. Not all seed will fall off so as seed head is in the bag gently bend and twist to get the rest of the seeds out. Use a sieve or colander and put contents of bag in to get out extra chaff. Then layout seeds on parchment for 7-10 days, or until all seeds are completely dry. Store in a cool, dry, dark spot.

Some good resources...

Books:

- Seed to Seed 2nd Edition - Author: Suzanne Ashworth
- Homesteading Handbook vol. 3: The Heirloom Seed Saving Guide - Author: Michelle Grande

Websites:

- seedsavers.org
- <https://www.farmersalmanac.com/saving-heirloom-seeds-30517>