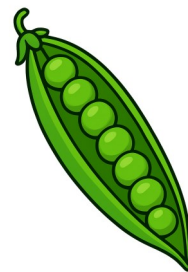


Basics of Seed Saving

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There are many reasons gardeners get interested in seed saving. It is a natural progression for any gardener to think about saving seeds, especially when we're at the check out line spending a bunch of money on seeds. There is also an enjoyment in the self-sustaining nature of growing your own food and saving seeds for the next season. Other reasons include, influencing plant traits and preserving varieties.

Choosing the Right Seeds

There are two broad categories of seeds, open pollinated seeds and F1 (first generation) hybrids. Hybrid seeds are a cross of two parent plants of different varieties, meaning collected seeds will not breed true. Crops grown from seeds of a hybrid, likely will not resemble and taste similar to the crop the seeds were saved from.

Open pollinated seeds are either self-pollinated or cross-pollinated. For beginning seed savers, self-pollinating plants are the much easier option. Self-pollinating crops include **peas, beans, tomatoes, and peppers**. Cross-pollinated crops include, **broccoli, cabbage, kale, corm, carrots, beets, squash, cucumbers, and melons**. Such crops require physical isolation either through distance, not planting different varieties, or manually closing flowers then hand pollinating the flower. Peppers, for example, have both male and female parts in their flowers, therefore they can self-pollinate. However, they can be cross pollinated. If you are looking to save seeds from a bell pepper but have jalapeños close in the same garden, there is a possibility the seeds from the bell pepper will have characteristics of the jalapeño. This can happen because bell pepper plants and jalapeño plants are the same species of plant (*Capsicum annuum*) but a different variety.

When is a Seed Ripe?

- **Peas and Beans** are ready when the pods turn brown on the vine and shrink against the seeds.
- **Pepper** seeds are ready when the pepper is at their full color and begins to wrinkle.
- **Tomato** seeds are ready for collection when the fruit is ripe for consumption.
- **Cucumber** seeds are ripe when the fruit turns fully yellow.
- **Summer Squash and Zucchini** seeds are ready when the fruit has fully matured. This is when the skin does not dent to the touch and is passed the point of when it would be harvested for consumption.
- **Winter Squash (like pumpkins)** are ready for seed saving when the rind is hard and the stem is woody.



Saving Tomato and Cucumber Seeds

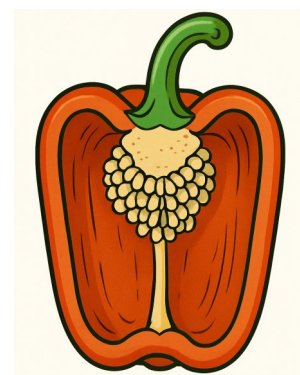
Because tomatoes and cucumbers have seeds that are coated with a “gel”, the first step is to remove the gel via fermentation. The gel surrounding the seeds inhibits germination from happening inside the fruit. Fair warning, **THIS PROCESS SMELLS BAD.**

Follow these steps:

1. Cut the fruit in half and scoop the seeds into a jar. Add a little a water to the jar, at most equal to the volume of seed and place the jar somewhere warm out of direct sunlight.
2. Let the mixture sit for 2 to 5 days, stirring daily. You may see a film or white mold form—it is harmless and can be mixed in.
3. Viable seeds will sink to the bottom of the jar.
4. After 2-5 days when all viable seeds have sank to the bottom and all the gel is off the seeds, scoop out the floating seeds and mold at the top. Rinse the pulp off the viable seeds.
5. Dry the seeds off with a cloth then spread the seeds on plastic, glass, or ceramic plate to dry for about 2 weeks. **DO NOT** put a paper towel or wax paper on the plate.
6. After 2 weeks label and store the seeds in a cool dry place.

Saving Pepper Seeds

1. When harvesting peppers for consumption, leave 1 or 2 fruit on the plant so the fruit can fully ripen and start to wrinkle.
2. Cut out the central mass and brush off the seeds.
3. Spread the seeds out and let them air dry.



Saving Pea and Bean Seeds

1. Leave the pods on the plant to ripen until the pods become dry and brown, and the seeds rattle in the pod.
2. Let the pods dry for another 2 weeks before hulling and harvesting the seeds.
3. If frost or extended periods of wet weather are in the forecast and the pods are ripe but not fully dry, pull the vine out by the roots. Hang the plants somewhere dry until they are ready for seed harvest.

Saving Squash Seeds

1. When squashes are ripe, harvest them, break them open and remove seeds.
2. Hold the seeds under running water and wash off any membrane and stringy material. This is easiest in a colander or strainer.
3. Spread seeds out to air dry.

Additional Resources:

Jessica Warren—University of Georgia Extension—Seed Saving Basics, <https://site.extension.uga.edu/camdenanr/2022/01/seed-saving-basics/>
Ron Goldy—Michigan State University Extension—Distance Matters When Saving Seeds, https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/distance_matters_when_saving_seed