

Seed Saving: Relearn an Ancient Skill

Self-Pollinating Annual Vegetables

Beans: Ready to harvest when the pods are dry, brittle & beans rattle inside.

Lettuce: Cut stalks when about half of the tiny flowers are white and fluffy. Or pick individual flowers. Rub off seeds. Winnow or blow away the fluff, leaving seeds.

Peas: Ready to harvest when the pods are dry, brittle & peas rattle inside.

Peppers: Peppers are self-pollinating, bees occasionally cross-pollinate. Harvest when very ripe. Scrape out seeds rinse and dry.

Tomato: Tomatoes are self pollinating bees occasionally cross pollinate. Pick the best ripest fruits. Ferment seeds for 3-6 days. Remove floating debris. Rinse till clean. Dry.

Cross-Pollinating Annual Vegetables (I – insect pollinated. W – wind pollinated)

Broccoli (I): Start early indoors and transplant outside for fall seed harvest. Cut the stalks when the seeds are dry and brittle, dry on trays, thresh and clean.

Cucumber (I): Let grow on vine till large, yellow/brown and hard. Cure for 2–3 weeks. Scoop seeds and ferment for 3-4 days. Rinse. Discard floating seed. Dry.

Corn (W): Plant in a large block of many plants, needs to cross-pollinate with a wide population to stay strong. Pollen carried by wind from tassels of one to silks of another. When kernels are mature and dry, strip down husks and hang cobs till dry.

Radish (I): Harvest seed stalks, Hang until dry. Collect seeds. Can cross pollinate with other radish varieties.

Spinach (W): select plants slower to bolt (send up seed stalks). Allow to flower and go to seed. Cut, strip off seeds. Can cross pollinate with other spinach.

Sunflower (I): Harvest when mature. Store and plant in shell.

Squash, Pumpkin, Gourd (I) Let grow big and hard, especially summer squash. Leave to cure and mature for about a month after picking. Scoop out seeds, rinse and dry.

Cucurbitaceae, not as hard as you think. Which types can you grow together to save seeds.

Citrullus – watermelon (*Citrullus lanatus*) and citron

Cucurbita – squash, pumpkin, zucchini, some gourds

- **Cucurbita maxima:** hubbard, banana, buttercup and turban squash, acorn, giant pumpkins
- **Cucurbita mixta:** the mixta species produce cylindrical, curved fruits that are bulbous at the apex.
- **Cucurbita moschata:** long and oblong shape instead of round and have tan rather than orange skin. cushaw, winter crookneck and butternut
- **Cucurbita pepo:** considered the true pumpkin, with bright orange skin and hard, woody, stems, also includes gourds; pattypan, crookneck & scallop summer squashes, zucchini, buttercup, sugar pie pumpkin

Cucumis – cucumber & various melons

- **Cucumis melo:** most melons and Armenian cucumber
- **Cucumis sativus:** cucumbers (except for Armenian cucumber, burr cucumber, and African horned cucumber)

If gourd family seeds come under a different scientific name (Bolded name), and are not hybrid, they can be grown side by side and the seeds saved.

Saving Seeds

Seeds have been saved throughout history, it was an essential skill to ensure future harvests.

Choosing Seeds

Varieties used for seed saving must be open-pollinated or heirloom varieties, seeds saved from these plants will produce fruit which will be the same as the parent plant. Saving seeds requires varying degrees of skill from easy to hard.

Easy Seeds

Easy seeds are great for beginners and grow plants that are less likely to cross-pollinate with other plants in that family. Tip: Stick with one variety of a plant, or separate different varieties with a taller buffer crop or by distance.

Medium Seeds

Medium seeds grow plants that are insect or wind pollinated. These seeds are more likely to cross-pollinate with another plant to grow a "mystery" plant. Tip: Choose only one variety from each plant or separate similar plants by placing them a good distance apart, like in the front and back yard.

Hard Seeds

Hard to save seeds grow plants that are wind or insect pollinated and very likely to cross-pollinate with other plant varieties. They may also take more than one season to produce seeds. Tips: Stick to a single plant variety, stagger growing times, and other advanced techniques to preserve the purity of the seed. It's also very important to check the botanical name to ensure which plants are related and susceptible to cross-pollination.

Three Ways to Save Seeds

At harvest time, please take some extra steps to save seeds. Save from your strongest, tastiest, and most vigorous plants.



Dry Seed Processing

For plants with seeds that grow on the outside of the plant.

- Allow the seed to dry on the plant and collect the seedpods before they break open. Some seeds will need to be further dried until hard.
- For plants with seeds that develop in the center of the flower, allow the plant to dry. When the stem holding the seed head turns brown, harvest the seed head or seeds.

Tip: Collect dry seeds under dry, warm conditions to prevent mold and reduce additional drying time.

Wet Seed Processing

For seeds that grow inside the fleshy fruit of the plant.

- Rinse off the seeds and dry them thoroughly.
- If the seeds have a gel-like coating, use the fermentation process.

Tip: not sure if your seeds have a coating: float them in a small amount of water to see if there is a gel coating



Storing Seeds

Once the seeds are completely dry, place in an airtight container and label with date and the name of your seeds. Store in a cool area, placing in an airtight container before seeds are dry will encourage mold to develop.

Fermentation Process

For seeds with a gel-like coating.

- Mix the seeds and the seed juice with a little water in a small plastic or glass container
- Allow to ferment for 4 - 6 days.
- When a layer of mold has formed on top of the water and the seeds sink, the fermentation process is complete. Pour off the mold and pulp. Rinse. The good seeds will sink to the bottom, while the bad seeds will float to the top making it simple to discard them.
- Drain the water from the seeds and set them out on a plate to dry thoroughly.

Tip: fermentation is used for seeds from tomatoes, cukes, some squash, and melon.

Learning how to save seeds is a skill that helps you and your community, reducing the reliance on commercial seed breeders.

