

Gardening to Save Seeds

Last fall, I participated in the Rocky Mountain Seed Alliance's "Seed Professionals" training. Prior to the course, I admittedly was a bit nervous about the scope of a six-day seed saving course; however, while the course was comprehensive, the material wasn't daunting. In fact, I learned that seed saving is quite accessible and even new gardeners can do it in their own backyard with some simple planning. Begin by researching how long it takes a crop to produce seeds. Knowing some basic botanical terms and the parts of the flower is also helpful, as well as differentiating between annuals and biennials (one season versus two seasons to produce seed).

For novices, I recommend beginning your seed saving journey with open-source self-pollinated annual varieties such as: tomatoes, lettuce, peas, beans, spinach, and peppers. Avoid saving seeds from patented and hybrid varieties. The offspring won't be the same with hybrids, and

it's against the law to save "Utility Patented" seeds. Although PVP (Plant Variety Protected) varieties are typically open-pollinated (non-hybrid) and home gardeners can use them for their own use, it is illegal for farmers to sell PVP plants. The patented seeds should be labeled on the original seed packets. Choose to save seeds from the most vigorous plants that have your most desired characteristics such as flavor, cold tolerance, maturity date, etc.

As you gain experience and interest, you may choose to save seeds from biennial plants and those that are not self-pollinated but require insects or wind for pollination. Biennials need to be stored over during the winter and exposed to cold (known as "vernalization"). To prevent cross contamination of your seeds, you can utilize hand pollination, caging, and alternate planting techniques. When planting for seed saving, choose the parent stock and mark the plants with ribbons or a label to set them apart.



Harvesting at the right time is important and varies depending on the plant. For beans and peas, allow the seeds to dry on the vine until they are brown or yellow. The seeds will rattle. You can clean the seed ("threshing") by beating them, gently pulling them apart, or utilize a seed cleaning screen. To properly store your seeds, choose airtight containers like jars or store them in a paper envelope in a cool and dry place. Properly label them by listing the type of plant and variety, the original seed source, and the last year it was grown.

To learn more about seed saving and join others in the community working to increase the self-sufficien-

cy and resilience of our community food system, please join UI Extension and Mountain Roost Farm at the grand opening of the Valley of the Tetons Seed Library at the Victor Library branch on Thursday, May 30th from 6pm to 7pm. The community seed library will be open for learning and free exchange of seeds starting June 1st. It will be a place to preserve seeds that are unique, heirloom and locally adapted to our short-season, high-altitude climate.

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