

Why Save Seed?

- Until recently, every gardener in the world saved their own seed from the plants that did best for them, and which they liked most.
- Now we appear to have the convenience of getting seeds from every plant we could possibly want, ready packaged. But this is an illusion. Glossy catalogues brim with attractive photographs of shiny vegetables and you can buy packets of seeds everywhere, from garden centre to corner shop, via all of the major supermarkets. Despite this the choice we have has actually diminished, with many varieties sold this way being very similar to each other.
- Many traditional, locally adapted varieties have disappeared from the catalogues. And many commercial seed varieties have been selected for qualities that suit industrial scale farming and supermarkets.
- Saving your own seed allows you to grow plants you like, which are suited to your growing conditions and to your own tastes.
- You can be a small-scale plant breeder, choosing what you like and increasing biodiversity at the same time!



Seed Saving – Something Different

What supermarkets and commercial growers want from a plant and what a gardener wants from a plant are often different.

- Thick skinned tomatoes are good for supermarkets, as they suffer less damage in transport. Thin skinned tomatoes are best for cooks, as they don't need to be skinned. Saving your own seed allows you to grow the type of plant that suits you.
- Beetroots grown commercially are selected for uniform bulbs. Beetroot tops are delicious but are discarded in mechanical harvesting. Saving your own seeds allows you to keep seed from plants that have great bulbs and tasty foliage.
- Additionally, some plants might have attractive foliage, unimportant in large fields but important in a small garden. Victorian gardeners used to grow Bulls Blood beetroot as a bedding plant!
- Tall pea varieties are difficult to harvest mechanically so most commercial peas are now dwarf varieties. Tall peas might be better if there is a shortage of space in a garden.
- By selecting to save seed from the plants that YOU like means that you can start to select for the characteristics you want to see in a plant.

Seed Saving – Yield

Do we always need to strive for bigger and bigger yields?

- When seed packets say “good for freezing”, it is code for “crops all at once”. This is good for the commercial grower, as the crop can be harvested all at once, but for the gardener it means that you will have a glut. By saving seeds from plants that crop over a longer period you will be able to spread the harvest and avoid hours spent pickling and preserving and enjoy more fresh from the plant.
- Most yields are measured from crops raised in perfect conditions. You can be sure that an Allington Pippin apple tree grown in a sunny, sheltered Kent orchard will have a very different yield from one grown on a hillside in Scotland! Choosing to save seed from plants that crop well in your own garden will ensure that the plants you grow are the ones best suited to give a good harvest in your local conditions.
- And it is easier for commercial growers to measure yields in a single harvest of a single crop. Varieties that can be harvested throughout the season are not as easy to measure but may well produce a greater yield overall.
- Finally, yield isn’t the be all and end all. We’ve all seen gardeners growing huge leeks for show that are pretty much inedible. High yield is not an indicator of individual quality.

Seed Saving – Money Saving

Seeds packets may be easily accessible but they are no longer cheap to buy. Choosing to grow half a dozen different types of vegetable can easily cost upwards of £20 in seeds. This may well be a small investment compared to the potential yield in crops, but it is still a significant up front cost.

- Saving seed means that there is no expense when sowing the crop in subsequent years.
- If you plant kale for seed, you will get about two and a half kilos of seed from a 20-foot-long bed of 30 plants. That's three-quarters of a million seeds
- If every one of those seeds is grown into new kale plants, you will have created more than 500,000 kilograms of kale! More than enough to feed all your friends and neighbours, and their families!

Seed Saving – A Living Inheritance

Saving seed from the plants that suit you best, growing those seeds into plants, seed saving again from the best plants and so on and so on. Over a period of years you will have developed a variety that is perfectly adapted to your tastes and to your growing conditions.

- This plant will be unique to you
- You will have bred a new variety of plant! It might even get a name

Seeds have always been handed down through the generations, with families or gardening groups having varieties that are unique to them. The seeds are valued and shared not only as a way of preserving the variety but as a way of remembering all of the generations who have grown before.

I have a plant, cutting rather than seed, but the principal is the same, that my grandfather took from a site in Denbigh, North Wales. The plant has moved with me through Cheshire, Perthshire, Glasgow and the Scottish Borders and is always a poignant reminder of my grandfather.

Seed Saving – A Bigger Picture

On a global scale, biodiversity is decreasing every day. Plant and animal species are being lost as habitats shrink or are lost completely. Many plant varieties have already been lost as the seed trade has favoured plant types suited to commercial, rather than small-scale growing.

Breeding for characteristics that suit current needs is all well and good, but if conditions change then that plant might not now be the right choice.

In her book, “Back Garden Seed Saving”, Sue Stickland gives this example:

➤ “The Old Cornish cauliflower had valuable resistance to ringspot and would have been useful in breeding programmes aimed at reducing the effects of this disease. In the 1950s, however, this strain was replaced by new ‘improved’ French varieties and disappeared from cultivation.”

Loss of diversity can make a crop vulnerable. The popular Cavendish banana is now at risk of extinction thanks to the spread of a new strain of Panama disease, which is almost impossible to eradicate. The banana is grown as a mono crop with no biodiversity. There is not another banana variety that we can switch to. If Panama disease cannot be controlled, and there are no signs that it can be, we will lose bananas completely.

Seed Saving – Garden Superheroes

Saving seed from plants:

- Saves money
- Connects you to the past
- Brings the satisfaction of growing plants to suit your own tastes
- Brings about an increase in biodiversity

And in the days of rush and stress, the very act of collecting seed, storing it, germinating, planting and regrowing the plants, collecting seed again and completing the cycle is wonderfully therapeutic!

REMEMBER

**You can only save seed from
NON-HYBRID varieties.**

**ONLY save seed from healthy plants that
are true to type.**

**Pull up and eat or discard less good
plants before they flower.**





Happy Seed Saving!

If you have enjoyed reading about pollination, why not join a SEED-CIRCLE and share your interest, enthusiasm, and of course your seeds, with others in your area.

Contact robin@abundantborders.org.uk

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Realseeds.co.uk

The website has lots of great information on how to grow, save and store seeds. They also sell seed to get started! We owe them special thanks for allowing us to use a lot of their information in these pages.

Back Garden Seed Saving – Sue Stickland

A fascinating book with lots of detail about saving seeds and it has easy to follow crop-by-crop guidelines.

Abundant Borders

There is lots of great information on our website at abundantborders.org.uk
We are happy to answer your questions through our Facebook Group
(<https://www.facebook.com/groups/virtualcommunitygarden/>)

Videos

A great selection of videos from DIY seeds
(<https://www.diyseeds.org/en/films/>)

