



## Saving and Storing Garden Seeds

Have you ever thought about saving seeds from your own vegetable garden to grow next year? It can certainly be done and isn't as hard as you might think. However, before you get started there are a few important things to keep in mind when selecting plants from which to save seeds.



### Avoid Hybrid Plants

Many, if not most, of the vegetable seeds and transplants you purchase at the garden store in spring are hybrid plants, developed through the crossing of two distinct parent lines. Hybrid plants are developed for their vigorous nature and improved disease resistance. They often have fruits that are more uniform in size, shape and color, have better storage quality and shipping ability. For tomatoes, improved shipping ability usually means the tomato flesh is firmer than that found in most heirloom tomatoes. However, hybrid plants do not grow 'true to type' from seed so aren't good candidates for seed saving.

Choose instead to save seed from open pollinated heirloom plants or naturally occurring plant species like red vein sorrel, *Rumex sanguineus*, which will grow 'true to type' from seed each time.

The next consideration is how to collect the seeds? This varies depending on how seeds are produced by the plant- either as dry seeds or wet seeds within a fruit. Harvest seeds from your healthiest, most vigorous plants.

### Dry Seeds

Many plants produce seeds in a dry seed head, such as lettuce or dill. To harvest lettuce, allow a few plants to mature and develop flower heads. Let the flower heads mature until seed stalks develop a fluffy dandelion appearance, just before the seeds are completely dried. Seeds will fall off the stalk and be lost if allowed to totally dry on the plant.

To harvest dill, cut the seed stalks when the seeds are fully sized and turning brown.

Bundled the stems together with rubber bands or string. The seed heads can be placed inside a paper bag as they dry to catch any seeds that fall. Hang the bundles to dry in a warm, well-ventilated location. Dry the harvested stalks until the seeds can be shaken or rubbed from the stems.

### Wet Seeds

Pick fruit from desirable plants when ripe. Cut fruit and squeeze out the pulp into a container. Add a little water, shake the mixture well, and let the pulp ferment 2-4 days at room temperatures, stirring occasionally. When

seeds settle to the bottom of the container, pour off the pulp at the top of the container. If necessary add more water and let any remaining pulp ferment again. When you have mostly seeds remaining, pour them into a fine sieve. Rinse them well and spread them in a thin layer on a piece of netting or screen, allowing them to dry thoroughly.

### **Beans and Peas**

Allow bean or pea pods to turn brown on the plant. Harvest the pods and dry them for 1-2 weeks. Shell them and they are ready for storage.

### **Seed Storage**

The first rule of seed storage is that after they are harvested and dried, they need a cold, dry environment for storage, ideally around 35° F. Seeds keep for a long time at these temperatures. Dryness is important because if they get moisture, the seeds will swell and sprout, as well as have the risk of rotting.

It's critical to keep seeds dry at all times – while using a seed packet indoors or outdoors, as well as when storing seeds. That's why seed packets should be opened in a dry place; take out just as many as you need. Then reseal the packets, put them back into a dry, airtight container and continue to store them in a cold, but frost-free place.

Where is the ideal storage spot? A shelf in the garage, basement, or laundry room is not a good storage spot; it gets too damp or hot at times during the year. An air-tight container in the refrigerator is a good location.

For more information on storing seeds, refer to Vegetable Garden Seed Storage and Germination Requirements, NebGuide G2090, <https://go.unl.edu/saveseed>.

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