

SAVING VEGETABLE SEEDS: *The Basics*

Many gardeners harvest their vegetable seeds to save money and to share their favorites with their friends. But the most important reason gardeners save seeds is because they enjoy a particular vegetable, usually an heirloom, and want to grow it again. The seeds from tomatoes, peppers, beans, and peas are easy to save because they are self-pollinating. Vegetables like squash or corn have both male and female flowers, so gardeners must prevent cross-pollination by wind or insects if they want to reproduce the same vegetable next year. Beans and peas are self-pollinating and stay pure year to year. Peppers also are less likely to be cross-pollinated.

Tomatoes will cross-pollinate but the chance of cross-pollination can be reduced by picking a fruit from a plant in the middle of a group of same tomato, thus increasing the chance of getting the same plant from seeds. With cucumbers, melons, and squash, the risk of cross-pollination is greater, and I recommend watching the referenced YouTube video if you are up for that challenge.

Do not bother saving the seeds from hybrids, which are designated F1 on the seed package. They are cross-pollinated, and the seeds will be an unknown combination of various hybrid traits and rarely the original hybrid.

In all cases, you are saving seeds from your favorite, disease-free vegetables. Allow that vegetable to grow well past the time you would pick it to eat. Wash off any dirt from the fruit. For peppers, beans, and peas, allow the vegetable to completely dry out. Peppers should be wrinkled and past their prime. Bean and pea seeds will rattle in their shells.



Dried pepper seeds



Bean seeds ready to harvest



Picking best tasting
for seed saving



Overgrown cucumber



Protective gel around seeds

Seeds from vegetables like tomato, cucumber, and squash are covered with a protective gel, which must be removed in a process called fermentation before setting the seeds out to dry. Put the gel-covered seeds in a jar of water and then shake the jar every day for about five days. The seeds at the bottom of the jar are the good seeds to be saved. Put them out on a plate to dry in an area with good circulation. Do not dry them in the sun.



Fermenting Tomato Seeds



Drying seeds

Seeds that are completely dry can be stored in jars or envelopes clearly marked with their name and date. Seeds that are not completely dry or are exposed to moisture can mold. Ideally, the seeds should be stored between 32° and 41°F. Consider storing them in the refrigerator.



Labeled jars of seeds



Labeled envelopes of seeds

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References:

Saving Vegetable Seeds: <https://extension.umn.edu/planting-and-growing-guides/saving-vegetable-seeds>

Rediscovering Seed Saving: <https://extension.umaine.edu/publications/2750e/>

How to Save Seeds of All Sorts: A Complete Guide to Garden Seed Saving; Frugal Gardening, 16 Jul. 2018.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2lpi14eLVfc>