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How to grow from seed workshop notes

Why save seeds?

- Save the genetic diversity of our food supply.
- Save the stuff you like. You can't trust seed companies to keep a line going just because you like it. In fact hundreds of varieties get scrapped each year simply for business reasons. More than [90 per cent of crop varieties have disappeared from farmers' fields](#) – due to industrialised agriculture.
- You'll have plenty of seed, without having to buy more each year.
- Immense satisfaction.

The basics

1. Know how to grow quality, healthy plants.

- Seeds are important and the best way to preserve something is to make it as robust as possible in the first place.

2. Know the sexual proclivities of your plants.

- What likes to be tickled by which insect, what lets it all blow in the in wind, and which plants are related and should be kept apart. Mostly you can tell from knowing about plant families and how each produces pollen etc, but there are also handy charts. (Handy chart link to be inserted here soon).

3. Planning

- Do your homework. know the best time to plant for a variety and how much time that part of the bed is going to be taken up. What you need to keep isolated from any of its relations. How much of something you should plant (just to scare you brassicas, want 200 to go to seed). Make notes.

4. Selection

- Play god. Through the growing season you want to observe, closely select the best performers, the best parents for your seed. If you continue to select the best plants each year, you'll eventually end up with a seed-strain well adapted to your climate and conditions, that has the best flowers or fruit and is pest and disease resistant.
- Keep records of what you're observing and what you want.
- Tag desirables and then don't eat them.
- Rogue out the undesirables. Anything that's weak, diseased, deformed; doesn't have what you're looking for or is fruiting or bolting too early – whip it out.

5. Harvesting

- Can be a long slow wait. You want to get your seeds at just the right time, when they've gone through all their natural processes and ready to basically fall off the plant. You're going to want to check them daily at this point.
- Flowering plants – the seeds are ready for harvest when they are dry
- Fruiting – need to stay on the plant about two weeks after you would harvest for eating
- Seeds don't always ripen at the same time so you'll have to keep checking back.

6. Drying and Cleaning

- Sieves Winnowing
- need to be clean and dry. Spread your seeds out evenly somewhere warm, dark and dry. Paper plates are good. Leave for about 2 weeks. Larger seed (beans etc) may be 3 weeks.

7. Storing

- Label your packets with full name of the species, when they were collected. Might like to add notes about them. Store them in a dry dark cool place. You can store them in the fridge. Don't store them in the freezer.

Three things I recommend you try saving first

Go home, have a play with these now in your garden. If you get a real feel for this seed-saving lark, get in touch with me and we can start looking at next year.

Beans (*Phaseolus vulgaris*) (not scarlet runners or broad beans):

- Generally self-pollinating but can cross, so grow different varieties at different intervals so not flowering at the same time.
- Look for the strongest and sturdiest plants with a good heavy crop of beans. Mark that plant and don't eat them leaving the pods to dry on the plant.
- About 6 weeks after harvesting for food seed is ready. Pods nice and dry, almost all the leaves have fallen off. Dry for 2-3 weeks in the pod.
- Unshell by hand or by foot – don't be too rough.
- Winnow between containers in a good breeze.
- Viable for about 4 years.

Lettuce:

- Self-pollinating but there can be some crossing, so grow multiple varieties apart.
- Lettuce wants to be grown quickly for the table but slowly for seed – plant in spring for seed that should be in the ground for over 4 months. Pull out anything that bolts sooner.
- Single lettuce plant can provide up to about 30,000 seeds.
- Seeds don't ripen all at once – usually over the course of a month you'll want to be checking.
- Shake heads carefully into a large bowl. Don't damage the stem.
- Winnow gently.
- Seeds will stay viable for about 3 years.
- Store for 6 months.

[Read another lettuce seed-saving article written by me](#)

Tomato:

- Grab a tomato, cut it open, scoop out the inside and put the seeds into a bowl of water.
- After three days it'll look at smell pretty yuck.
- Scoop off the scum at the top. Take the seeds at the bottom, dry them on sheets of paper.
- Store like that and rip off to plant.

Best seed-saving books

- [Save Your Own Seed – Kay Baxter](#)
- [Seed to Seed – Suzanne Ashworth](#)
- [Breed Your Own Vegetable Varieties – Carol Deppe](#)

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