



Saving Seeds

By The Salisbury Centre

Saving seeds involves cleaning, drying, and storing properly. Follow these steps!

Check seeds are ready

Seeds produced in 'dry' fruit (beans, peas, sunflowers, etc) should be harvested when they're dry - they're ready when they start rattling in their pod, or falling from the plant. Seeds from 'wet' fruit should be harvested when the fruit is slightly over-ripe.

Remove from casing

Separate the seeds from the fruit/flower/pods by splitting, crushing, shaking, or even stomping! Also get rid of any seeds that are damaged or split.

Separate from chaff

Remove any extra plant material by winnowing - tossing the seeds in the air and catching, or slowly pouring the seeds into a new container from a height, both help to blow away the chaff. Also try sieving, swirling around in a container, or separate by hand!

Place in labelled tea filter or paper envelope

Tea filters are a handy size, can fit into any container, and are porous to allow further drying. Or a paper envelope can be used instead.

Storing your seeds for future use!

Seeds need to be fully dried before they're stored. To do this you can place in some dry rice that has been baked in the oven! Then store in a cool, dry place.

Practical Seed Saving Overview

Introduction to Seed Saving Workshop by Hannah Brazil

Tools:

For seed saving on a small scale there's no need to buy any specific tools and instead an invitation to get creative using what you have and enjoy working with.

These might be helpful:

- **scissors, secateurs or a sharp pocket-knife** to cut seed pods off the mother plant
- all sizes of **plastic or paper bags** to collect your seeds into while harvesting and for short-term storage during transportation
- all sizes of **plastic containers** or glass jars to collect your seeds into while harvesting and for short-term storage during transportation.
- **Sieves, colanders and other perforated materials** to use in the cleaning process of dry seeds to separate seeds from the chaff. If you prefer to buy special **seed-cleaning screens** 2mm and 5mm hole sizes are particularly useful
- **glass jars** for wet seed fermentation and final storage of dried seeds
- **buckets or bowls** for winnowing and threshing, and harvesting larger amounts of seeds into
- **wind, a desk fan, hair dryer, or blowing** using your breath for winnowing
- **a warm, dry place** to dry your seeds in
- **plates, chopping boards, mesh frames** for drying
- **rice (or silica gel)** for use in the drying process
- **labels and pens**
- ideally **air-tight containers** and **paper envelopes** or **tea filters** for storage

Collecting/Harvesting:

- only collect seeds from **healthy plants** and select plants that have the qualities you would like to have in your seedlings
- make sure your seeds are **ready** to be collected. This is often weeks after the time you would harvest for consumption. Dry seeds generally turn from green to brown/black, from soft to hard, moist to dry, some seed pods will open naturally when seeds are ready (e.g. poppies). Wet seeds found in fruit and berries (e.g. tomato, cucumber, pumpkin/squash, apples) are ready when the fruit/berry is properly ripe
- in humid weather: cut the seed pods with stalks before they are completely ready and continue drying indoors hanging upside down or laid out flat and regularly turned

Cleaning:

At this stage we separate the seeds from the chaff (pods, fruit, other plant material). Depending on the size and type of seed there are different methods and steps to do so.

- **peeling/separating** just by hand
- **threshing** (shaking into a bucket or bag, stomping on, hitting, rubbing between hands/fingers) – this is done to break open the containers of dry seeds
- **sieving/screening** – separating seeds from chaff by size
- **winnowing** – separating by density (using air to separate heavier seeds from lighter chaff, generally done by pouring seeds from one container into another)
- **wet seeds:** separate seeds from the fruit by hand. **Fermenting** the seeds in a glass jar with a little bit of water for a few days can help to remove the pulp as well as the natural germination inhibiting seed coating of tomato and cucumber seeds

Drying:

- dry in a **warm** (ideally around 20°C, definitely not hotter than 35°C) out of direct sunlight, **dry** and **well-ventilated** place with stable conditions
- dry on **plates**, in **trays** or on **mesh screens**, once seeds are dry enough to not stick you can also use **cloth or paper towels** (make sure to move the seeds around regularly to ensure even drying)
- depending on seeds, dry for a few days to 2 weeks
- for extra dryness and long storage:

Baked rice method: - 5:1 rice to seeds

- bake the rice in the oven to dry it out completely, fill into closed container while it's still hot (glass jars work well)
- once it's cooled place the seeds in a paper envelop or tea filter in the jar and close immediately to dry out further

sachets of Silica Gel can also be useful to add to seed containers to dry them out further

Storing:

- store dried seeds in a **cool, dry** and **dark** place under stable conditions (avoiding humidity is the most important aspect), in air-tight containers for longer storage (2 years+)
- **paper envelopes** or **tea filters** are great for shorter storage (and they're environmentally friendly). If they are placed in air-tight containers seeds will last much longer (2-5years). **Plastic bags** for fully dried seeds work well too (check for mould if unsure)
- **glass jars** with rubber seals or **tupperware boxes** are great to use as containers
- if processed, dried and stored correctly most seeds will last for 2-5 years with good germination rates but will often still be viable for many years afterwards as well. Some seeds only last for a year, e.g. parsnip, onion and parsley).
- For very long storage (10-20 years+) you can store fully dried and sealed seeds in the fridge or freezer

Useful Resources

Websites:

- <https://www.seedsovereignty.info>
- <https://www.realseeds.co.uk>
- <https://www.gaiafoundation.org>
- <https://vitalseeds.co.uk>
- <https://learntosaveseeds.com> (great online seed saving course organised by the vital seeds team)
- <https://www.nourishscotland.org> (food sovereignty)

Books:

- *Back Garden Seed Saving – Keeping your Vegetable Heritage Alive* by Sue Stickland
- *The Seed Garden: The Art and Practice of Seed Saving* by Jared Zystro and Micaela Colley
- *Who Really Feeds the World* by Vandana Shiva (critique of industrial agriculture and GMO's, background on why small scale, organic growing and seed saving is important)

Films:

- SEED – The Untold Story
- Seed of Freedom Trilogy (Gaia Foundation)
- The Need to Grow