

Six Tips for Saving Seed

Seed saving can be complicated, but if you start with these solid tips you'll be on the path to saving and sharing quality seed:

- 1 Know your seed.** Don't save seeds from a hybrid variety (often labeled as "F1" in catalogs or seed packets). They won't grow "true to type" to the original parent, and the next generation of plants will be highly unpredictable in overall type, quality, and flavor.
- 2 Save information, not just seed.** Keep good records from the start. The information you pass on is as important as the seed. Make note of common and Latin names; dates of planting, plant maturity, and seed harvest; whether off-types were culled; population size and isolation distance; and any other important observations about the variety.
- 3 Watch for cross-pollination.** Different varieties of crops of the same species can cross-pollinate, producing offspring with different characteristics than the original variety. To keep a variety "pure," you should plant in isolation to minimize the chance of crossing. Crops that are wind or insect pollinated (often called "outcrossers") require a greater isolation distance from other varieties of the same species than those that have flowers that self-pollinate (often called "selfers"). *See the Seed Matters Seed Saving Chart for isolation distances.*
- 4 Consider plant populations — numbers count.** To maintain the genetic integrity of a variety, it's important to save seed from a diverse population of individual plants. The optimum population size differs depending on whether a variety is wind or insect pollinated, or self-pollinated. *See the Seed Matters Seed Saving Chart for population sizes.*
- 5 Choose ideal plants for ideal seed.** Healthy, vigorous plants are more likely to produce healthy, vigorous seed. Save seeds from disease-free plants to help prevent seed-borne disease. Also, collect seeds from plants that show ideal characteristics (shape, color, dates to maturity) that match the variety's description.
- 6 Make it last.** Good storage practices will increase the long-term viability of your seed. Store only seed that has been checked for pests and is fully mature and dry. The storage area should be dark, dry, cool, and protected from pests.

