

Notes from the Garden Club Meeting 3rd December 2025

Vegetable Seed Saving

Why Save Seeds

There are a number of reasons why saving vegetable seeds is worthwhile, these are:-

1. It offers greater choice, particularly with regard to:-
 - Flavour
 - Ability to grow in our climate and soil conditions.
 - Providing an alternative to the limited choice given by supermarkets.
 - Growing heritage variety vegetables offers gardeners the ability to grow something different.
2. It is an opportunity to save money.
3. It helps to save older vegetable varieties developed in our region, which are absent from commercial seed catalogues.
4. It could prevent loss of genetic diversity in vegetable crops. There is a risk that the commercial seed varieties relied on at present may not be able to adapt to cope with new diseases or changes in climate. By saving seeds of older heritage varieties of vegetables, a genetic pool is created that could help prevent future food security problems.

Problems with Saving Seeds

1. Seeds are only worth saving if they come from Heritage Varieties, as only these older varieties are capable of growing true (identical) from saved seed. Modern hybrid F1 varieties will not produce identical plants to their parents if grown from saved seeds.
2. Ensuring the purity of saved seeds can be difficult.

Pollination

Explaining pollination will require a small amount of basic botany:-

There are three flower types

- **Perfect** - Where individual flowers contain both male and female parts. All perfect flowers have the ability to be pollinated by cross- pollination, but some perfect flowers are predominantly self-fertile e.g. peas, tomatoes and some bean varieties. This means that it is relatively easy to ensure the purity of self-pollinating plants provided only one variety is grown, (if a number of varieties of the same plant are to be grown for seed they will need to be isolated from each other to ensure their purity).
- **Monoecious** - Where an individual plant carries separate male and female flowers, eg squash and courgettes.
- **Dioecious** - Where male and female flowers are carried by separate plants, eg spinach.

Plants with separate male and female flowers have to be cross pollinated. This can be done by insects, the wind, or by human intervention. Note human intervention involves brushing pollen from the anthers of one flower onto the stigma of another flower and then, if you are looking for pure seeds, tying a fine mesh bag over the flower or flower truss that has received the pollen. The bag is to ensure that the flower is isolated, so that no rogue pollen can contaminate the seeds; they can be removed when the flowering period is over. See

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hd4MmbWks2E>

Keeping Seed Varieties Pure

Purity of the seeds can be ensured by either planting only one variety of the particular veg you want to collect seeds from, or by planting different varieties of the veg at a distance from each other, or by creating a physical barrier around the plants you wish to gather seeds from. See Garden Organics Heritage Seed Library Seed Saving Guidelines

<https://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/expert-advice/garden-management/seed-saving/seed-saving-guidelines> for advice;-

- On creating barriers - in the section on Isolation and Pollination.
- On distances - in the section dedicated to the crop you intend to grow.

Planting openly at a distance from similar plants allows insects access to the crop for pollination. However, planting even one variety of a crop that needs cross-pollinating can be difficult if a local farmer or neighbour is growing a different variety of the same plant. Also note that pollen from wild carrots will cross-pollinate domestic carrots.

Physical barriers will prevent cross-pollination, to get round this Sue Stickland and Garden Organic both suggest that insects should be introduced into the covered area to cross-pollinate the crop.

Seed Drying and Storage

The advice is to use the best and strongest plants you have grown to keep seeds from. Weeding out plants that are weak, or appear different, or ones that bolt. This is the best way to slowly improve the quality of the seed you grow.

It takes time after the edible stage of the veg for seeds to develop and mature, and everyone I have read on the subject says it is important to be patient and wait and let the seeds develop and if time allows dry naturally. The length of time this will take is dependent on the crop, so refer to the Garden Organics Heritage Seed Library Seed Saving Guidelines for advice. If weather conditions make this impossible Sue Stickland advises that you should lift the whole plant and bring it into a warm airy place, laying it in a tray or hanging in a paper bag to collect the seeds.

Seeds harvested from wet pulp, such as cucumbers, courgettes and pumpkins will need washing and drying. Those from tomato pulp will need washing and specialist fermenting if they are to be saved for more than a year, (see Garden Organics Heritage Seed Library Seed Saving Guidelines for tomatoes for advice).

Maturity and dryness are generally indicated by a change in colour and texture. At this stage, the seeds are ready to be cleaned. Debris surrounding the seeds should be removed to prevent diseases damaging and shortening the life of the stored seeds. This can be as simple as podding and picking over peas and bean seeds. Small seeds, such as lettuce and brassica seeds, can be crumbled out of their coverings into a sieve that allows the seeds through, followed by a finer sieve to get rid of the chaff. Sue Stickland also suggests winnowing with a hairdrier and warns that a mask is needed as it can be a dusty job.

After cleaning if the seeds do not appear to be dry, (washed seeds will fall into this category), put them separated out on a flat dish in the airing cupboard or in an airy warm space for a time to dry. Before storing, labelled with the plant name and date, in a paper envelope.

Useful book and web sites

Books : Back Garden Seed Saving by Sue Strickland Published 2008 by Eco-Logic Books
Heritage Vegetables: The Gardeners Guide to Cultivating Diversity by Sue Strickland Published 1998 by Gaia Books Ltd

Web site : Garden Organics Heritage Seed Library Seed Saving Guidelines

<https://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/expert-advice/garden-management/seed-saving/seed-saving-guidelines>

YouTube channel : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hd4MmbWks2E>

<https://www.youtube.com/@GardenOrganic>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XUk7Ley3zNM>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OvTBVC9s_a4