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## PRESERVING SEEDS FOR YOUR GARDEN

Given the current economic situation, garden seeds are once again in demand. People are wisely cutting their budgets and looking for ways to reduce their food bills. One way to do that is to grow your own vegetables.

Whether you decide to buy seeds in a garden store or dry seeds on your own from a garden crop, you need to be aware of proper drying and storage methods to assure that your stock of seeds lasts several years. If you do not do this correctly, the lifespan and viability of your seeds will be very short. If you do it correctly, properly stored seeds will remain viable and will germinate for several years after storage.

The key to making seeds last for many years is to dry them properly and put them in a state of dormancy, which slows down their internal metabolism. If the seeds hold too much moisture, they will continue to con-

sume their internal energy and will die. Drying them out too much can also shorten their lives, but that is less of a threat than allowing them to retain moisture. The key to keeping seeds dormant is to keep them cool and dry.

Open Pollinated or heirloom, self-pollinated plants are the only varieties that will grow true from seed, meaning the seedlings will be exactly like the parents. These are the seeds worth saving.

Seeds that have been hybridized will grow into a variety of plants with some characteristics of either or both parents. Many, if not most, of the plants being sold now are hybrids. Hybridizing can create a plant with desirable traits and affords some job security for the seed company. Seed saving is not really an option with hybrids, unless you are looking to discover something new.

## **Drying Techniques for Seeds**

This works for a wide range of seeds, including beans, tomatoes, peas, squash, melons, and other seed bearing vegetables. Seeds should be taken from ripe fruits and vegetables. Some people save seeds from the first tomatoes that ripen every year. The belief is that this will encourage crops that ripen early.

The most common method is to simply pick the seeds from uncooked vegetables and wash them by gently rubbing them between your fingers. Some seeds, such as tomatoes, have a jelly-like coating that should be removed. The seeds can then be left on a dry paper towel in a warm, dry environment to let them dry out naturally.

### **Preserving Seeds With Proper Storage**

Remember that it is important to keep seeds cool and dry. That means that they cannot be exposed to intermittent high moisture, such as during rainy seasons. Moisture can start to bring seeds out of dormancy and will shorten their lives.

Once your seeds are dried properly, they need to be sealed in glass jars, ZipLock baggies, or plastic containers and stored somewhere cool, dry and dark. A closet or box in a cool base

ment will typically work well. You can refrigerate or freeze seeds if you wish. Freezing can increase the longevity up to ten times. Refrigeration can extend the viability up to five times longer than normal. If your seeds would normally last three or four years with proper storage, freezing or refrigeration extends this significantly.

If you store seeds every year, make sure that you rotate your stock to keep it fresh. Some seed storing enthusiasts periodically check the viability of the older stock of seeds by placing perhaps ten to twenty seeds in a wet paper towel that is placed into a closed ZipLock bag. Place the bag in a warm place and check to see how many seeds germinate. This will tell you if your stock of seeds is reaching their limit for storage.

If you don't want to dry non-hybrid, known as heirloom seeds, you can buy your local store-bought garden seeds and just store them in a dry, cool area. I would suggest purchasing two years' worth of these seeds and storing them properly. For detailed information check out these links:

[www.seedsave.org](http://www.seedsave.org)

<http://gardening.about.com/od/gardenmaintenance/a/SeedSaving.htm>

<http://www.tomatofest.com/>

[www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/horticulture/M1226.html](http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/horticulture/M1226.html)