

COMMUNITY SEED EXCHANGE

SAVING SEED FROM THE 3 SISTERS

Beans, corn, squash are the traditional crops known as 3 Sisters. Read on for more information on why seed saving is important, things to generally consider when saving seed and the specifics of how to save the 3 Sisters, so you'll be able to grow and enjoy them again next year.

Why Save seed?

- It's a 10,000 year old tradition.
- Seeds adapt to their growing conditions.
- Preserve traits and varieties you find desirable.
- Keep seeds in the public commons.
- Preserve biodiversity; slow down genetic erosion.
- Build a more self reliant and resilient community.
- Experience abundance - there are 22,000 lettuce seeds per ounce!

Tips for Successful Seed Saving

- Know your seed – Open-pollinated seeds are best for seed savers.
- Self-pollinated crops are the easiest to save - beans, lettuce, peas, tomatoes.
- Keep records of what you plant and when.
- Watch for cross pollination – to maintain seed purity, keep plants in the same species separated or planted at different times so they won't cross.
- Population size matters- some varieties need bigger populations in order to keep genetic pool strong – corn is a good example of a variety that needs a large population.
- Observe your plants throughout the growing season – leave flowers on plants as they turn from green to brown.
- Select seed from as many healthy plants of the same variety.
- Store new clean seeds in cool, dark, dry conditions.
- If seed is stored well, it can remain viable for years - see each crop for specifics.



SAVING BEAN SEEDS

Recommended population size for home gardens:
1 plant for viable seed; 5-10 plants for variety maintenance

- Let bean pods mature on plant.
- Select brown dry pods from many plants.
- Open pods and remove seed.
- Label with variety name and date.
- Store new seed in paper envelopes or glass jars in cool, dark, dry conditions.
- Stored well, bean seeds remain viable for at least 3-4 years.

Saving 'True Red Cranberry' Beans:



1. Vegetative growth



2. Flowers emerge



3. Pods form



4. Pods mature and dry



5. New seed

SAVING CORN SEEDS

Recommended population size for home gardens:
10 plants for viable seed; 50-120 plants for variety maintenance

- Corn is very susceptible to inbreeding depression, so plant as large a population as possible.
- Corn is wind pollinated, so plant in blocks for best pollination.
- Let corn remain on stalks until stalks and husks have turned completely brown.
- Remove ears from stalks, then remove husks so mildew doesn't develop in drying process.
- Let ears dry for at least 2 months. Protect from rodents.
- Label your seed with variety name and year it was saved.
- Remove kernels from ears.
- Store new seed in paper envelopes or glass jars in cool, dark, dry conditions.
- Stored well, corn seeds remain viable for 5 years.

Saving 'Dakota Black' Popcorn:



1. Vegetative growth



2. Tassels form



3. Ears form, silks emerge



4. Harvested ears



5. New seed

SAVING SQUASH SEEDS

Recommended population size for home gardens:
1 plant for viable seed; 5 plants for variety maintenance

- For pure seed, make sure you only have one squash/pumpkin species growing at a time.*
- Let squash mature on plant until slightly overripe.
- Harvest healthy squash from as many plants of the same variety.
- Move squash to shade or indoors to rest for at least another month - seeds continue to mature.
- Cut open squash and remove seeds.
- Wash seeds and remove pulp.
- Label your seed with variety name and year it was saved.
- Let seeds dry for at least 7 days out of sun.
- Store new seed in paper envelopes or glass jars in cool, dark, dry conditions.
- Stored well, seed remains viable for at least 6 years.

*Squash and pumpkins are generally classified into 1 genus and 4 species. You can grow only one of each species at a time or stagger the flowering time if you want to avoid cross pollination.

- *Curcubita argyosperma* (formerly 'mixta') – squash and gourds
- *Cucurbita maxima* – winter squash and pumpkins
- *Cucurbita moschata* – winter squash and pumpkins
- *Cucurbita pepo* – summer squash, winter squash, pumpkins and gourds

Saving 'Red Kuri' squash:



1. Vegetative growth



2. Plants flower, then set fruit



3. Fruit rests; seed matures



4. Seeds removed



5. New seeds drying