



# Nature & Nurture's Seed Saving Guide

## Why Save Your Own Seeds?

- 1) Save money by not having to buy new seeds
- 2) Learn new skills and become a more knowledgeable gardener
- 3) Be a part of the full cycle of a plant's life!
- 4) Become more self-sufficient
- 5) It's fun!

## Basic Seed Saving Guidelines

What follows is a simple seed saving guide for a variety of crops that we think are easiest to save seed from. There are some simple guidelines that you should try to follow when saving seeds but if you can't meet these guidelines, save the seeds anyways!

- Save seeds from heirloom (non-hybrid) varieties (types)
- Collect (save) seeds from a minimum of 6 plants of each variety (type)
- To minimize cross pollination, separate different varieties (types) of the same crop by at least 10 feet
- Save seeds from the best plants and don't save seeds from "runty" plants

## Easy Seed Saving Crops

Tomatoes  
Peppers  
Beans  
Peas  
Arugula  
Lettuce

Dill  
Cilantro/coriander  
Calendula  
Sunflowers

### **How do I know when the seeds are ready?**

- Tomatoes and peppers: the seeds are ready when the tomato/pepper is fully ripe (for peppers this will be any color other than green)
- For podded crops like beans, peas, and arugula, the seeds are ripe when the pods turn from green to tan/brown. Collect them before they rot or fall to the ground.
- Lettuce: collect seeds when the seed heads produce white tufts
- Dill, cilantro, and calendula: collect the seeds when they turn from green to tan/brown but before they fall to the ground.
- Sunflowers: collect the seeds when the seed shell is hard (get the seeds before the birds get them!)

### **How do I harvest wet-seeded crops like tomatoes?**

- Tomatoes: Place tomatoes in a container and step on them to release the seeds. Ferment them for about 3 days. See our [tomato seed saving resource](#) for details
- Peppers
  - Harvest seeds by cutting open the fruit, then scraping seeds onto a paper plate. Seeds should be light yellowish white - don't save any seeds that are darker in color.
  - Let seeds dry in a single layer on a screen or plate for a couple weeks, in a dry area with good circulation, but out of the sun.

### **How do I harvest dry-seeded crops?**

- Beans & Peas
  - Pick individual pods or cut plants. After harvesting, let the pods/plants dry in a dry area with good air circulation for 2 weeks. Consider using a dehumidifier for large quantities.
  - Once seeds have dried, you can either individually take pods and pop the seeds out by hand, or put the beans on a tarp and "stomp" on them to separate the seeds from the pods. The "stomping" method only works if the pods are super dry.
- Arugula
  - Before the seeds fall, harvest seed pods by clipping stems off of the plant and place in a paper bag, bucket or on a piece of cloth.
  - Let stems/pods dry out for about a week or so, till you can hear them rattle when you shake them.

- To release the seeds from the pods, crumble the seed pods with your hands (or feet) into a container.
- Shake the container so that seeds fall to the bottom. Lift off stems with hands.
- Winnow the mixture to separate seeds from chaff.
- Lettuce, Dill, Cilantro/Coriander
  - When seeds are ready to be harvested, gently bend over the stems and shake the seeds into a bucket.
  - Winnow this mixture to separate seeds from chaff
- Calendula
  - Once seeds are dry on the plant, harvest seeds by grasping them with your fingers and place into a paper bag. Save seeds from as many plants as possible to keep genetic diversity in your seeds. Different varieties of calendula can be cross-pollinated by bees - it's always fun to see what colors you get next year!
- Sunflowers
  - Cut seed-heads and dry in a single layer in a dry area with good circulation.
  - Release the seeds by hand.



Interns stomping tomatoes to release seeds



Erica winnowing bean seeds

## Winnowing - How to Separate Seeds from Chaff

What is winnowing? Just as our ancestors did, winnowing uses moving air to separate seeds from the chaff. While our ancestors used baskets, gourds, and natural wind we use plastic containers and a fan to make it easier. Imagine if we had to clean all of the grains that we eat this way!

How to winnow:

1. Work outside. Place a box fan onto an object so that it is 1-2' off of the ground
2. Place a med-large container (dish pan or plastic tote) on the ground in front of the fan
3. Turn the fan on low
4. Place seeds into a small plastic container. It's best to start with a small amount of seeds as a test until you get the hang of it. Pour seeds/chaff in front of the fan so that the seeds fall into the container and the chaff blows away. If necessary, adjust the fan speed or adjust the working distance from the fan. If the seeds are really small, turn the fan around and winnow on the back side of the fan.

---

## Happy Seed Saving!

