



TPLT Archive, 2022,08,15, Critical Thinking #2 Save Seeds NOW

#2— On Future Foods {2022/08/15}

Learn and Practice Saving Seeds, NOW!

There Are Major Reasons to Do This

First Reason – Saving seeds is a very important skill for long-term self-reliance living. Start now before it becomes a life or death necessity. To date, none of us has been in a situation where survival depended on us saving our own seeds. That thought is almost unimaginable, but do you want to take the chance that such a situation would never happen?

Second Reason – Seeds might still be available during troubled times, but at very high costs, only in limited quantity/variety, and of questionable quality.

Third Reason – We live in a time of supply-chain disruption, rotating shortages, and worsening drought, periodic flooding, all leading to uncertain food security for many. This situation will likely worsen beyond our ability to rely upon the systems of supply we have all come to expect. If you have a lot of saved seeds and know how to produce more you have the ability, with work, patience, and adaptability, to continue producing food. You will also have a very valuable commodity with which to bless the lives of others.

With these thoughts in mind, we'll briefly cover a few important concepts to either get you started saving seeds this year or reinforce the importance of what you are already doing. For the complete story, I refer you to three of the best books on the topic: **The Resilient Gardener** by Carol Deppe, **Seed to Seed** by Suzanne Ashworth, and **Seed Saving** by Caleb Warnock. You should have all three.



Cultivating Seeds

Different plants produce their seeds differently. For example, carrots, beets, and swish chard produce seeds only in their second year. Potatoes produce seeds, but it's not practical to grow potatoes from their seeds, instead we clone the parent plant (by cutting the tuber into pieces) to produce identical offspring. Most plants produce viable seeds only when the fruit or vegetable is fully ripe (mature).

Most fruits and vegetables are harvested when they are just ripe, but the seeds are not yet mature. These immature seeds are not viable (will not germinate), such as summer squash, string beans, peas, corn, and tomatoes. For these, you need to let some of the fruits or vegetables stay on the live plant until fully mature.

Let one zucchini get fully mature (big, turning yellow, and hard) and you will have more than enough seeds for you and your neighbors. Let several ears of corn stay on the stalk until mature and fully dry, the same for peas and string beans. Tomatoes should remain on the vine until they are "overripe", then picked and fermented in a jar for several days before separating, cleaning, and drying the seeds.

Winter squashes should be harvested when fully mature, then cured (hardened off for storage). Just save the seeds from the best samples when preparing the squash for cooking.

You must take an active hand in the pollinating process for corn and squash to prevent them from being very easily cross-pollinating with other corn or squash varieties in the area. If you don't get seriously involved in this process as described in the books above you will likely get seeds that produce unappetizing *pump-squash* or *odd-colored very unsweet-corn*.

For crops that produce seeds in the second year, leave some of the plants in the ground, and cover them for the winter in a way so frost does not kill the roots. Or, for some, the root crop (carrots, beets, etc.) can be carefully harvested in the late fall with their tops still attached, stored properly in a "root cellar" and then replanted the next spring to bolt and produce seeds.

It's Not Too Late to Begin This Year

For some crops, you must plan and be ready to take precise actions early in the growing year to prevent cross-pollination that will give undesirable seeds. Corn is one crop where this applies in a major way. We'll skip corn this time because it is past the time to preserve good seeds for next year. However, there is yet time to learn (in the books mentioned above) how to hand-pollinate squash blossoms, it's easy and very satisfying to see what you can accomplish when you do it right.

The common beans and peas are the easiest for the beginner to work with because they are self-pollinating. They have small flowers and produce little nectar. For these reasons they are not very attractive to the bees unless there is little else for them to feed on. This means you do not have a big concern about crossing varieties. In the long run, you want to study up on them too, but if you are new to seed saving, start with beans and peas, they are very easy, and success is almost guaranteed.

Heirloom (AKA open pollinated) vs. Hybrid.

Hybrid seeds are the result of cross-pollination breeding or GMO manipulation to achieve desired characteristics, such as sweetness, drought, disease resistance, etc.

When growing hybrid plants, the seeds you get from them may or MAY NOT give the same results as the parent.

- The seeds from hybrid plants may not even germinate or may grow poorly.
- They may produce the same vegetable as the original, or more likely they will have less desirable characteristics in the second generation, and get worse in their devolution.

Ideally, grow only heirloom varieties even though you may get cross-pollination and not even know it. For example, if your neighbor has a variety that can cross with yours, you may end up with something different. That's why planting times and variety selections are important to learn about for some crops, plus other strategies to keep your saved seeds genetically uncontaminated.

If you plant hybrids, save the seeds anyway, in case there are no other seeds available.

However, it is very, very important that you keep a record of their planting details:

- where the seeds came from, •when they were planted, •what the growing conditions were, what the yield results were, and •be able to know where any more of the remaining seeds of each variety are located, so you don't inadvertently mix into future planting seeds with undesirable characteristics.

Seeds from Grocery Store?

Most grocery store vegetables are picked at an immature seed stage and will rarely have viable seeds. The most notable common exceptions will be:

- Winter Squash such as Acorn, Butternut, Hubbard, and Banana. Save the seeds from the best samples when preparing the squash for cooking.

- Whole dry beans such as black, pinto, pink, red, navy, lima (butter beans), lentil, etc.

- Grocery store potatoes are usually treated with a growth retardant to slow them from sprouting, but if you keep them at room temperature, don't let them dry out and shrivel

too much, plus let them have some daylight they will usually start to grow “legs”. They can then be cut up and planted.

- Fresh onion bulbs can be rooted to grow a stalk, and bloom to make seeds from which you can produce sets.

- Fresh grocery store garlic bulbs can be separated into individual cloves to plant. You don’t get variety, but they do grow fine. You can then save and harvest your own garlic in the future, year after year. However, you will have better garlic and a varied selection if you get a few varieties from a friend or an organic grower.

NEVER, NEVER USE GMO SEEDS!

Absolutely do not save seeds from GMO fruits or vegetables or you might find yourself with a lawsuit for patent infringement. Furthermore, if such plants were to grow in your garden they could cross-pollinate with other plants and introduce undesirable traits. So **NEVER USE SEEDS from GMO plants!**

Get one or more of the recommended books and get started saving seeds this fall so you can plant them next year to test the results of your trial. Keep at it and you will change the information in this article and the listed books using your practical experience to create practical knowledge ➡ I x E = K {Information x Experience = Knowledge}.

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Coming Topics on Future Foods Include:

- *How to test your seeds for viability before planting*
- *What are the most important crops to grow and seeds to save*
- *How to store seeds for the long-term that you buy or save from your garden*