

Save Your Seeds

Overview: Saving seed from your favorite plants in home and school gardens is a fun end-of-the-season activity.

Materials:

flat surfaces (e.g., trays or screens) for drying seeds
envelopes and glass jars for storage
markers and/or labels
small paper bags (for gathering small seeds)
[Seed Saving: Easy Annual Vegetables and Flowers](#)



Approximate Time to Complete: Will vary depending on length of time to fully dry seeds

Location: Indoor and outdoor

Ages: All ages

Season: Summer and fall

Instructions:

1. During the growing season, make sure to note your favorite flowers and best-producing vegetable plants. When harvest time comes, remember to save seeds from all your special jewels. Keep in mind though that not all seeds will produce plants that look just like their parents. *See note below for more details.
2. Carefully monitor your plants for ripe seeds. Seeds are produced and mature in different ways and places for different crops. For example, bean seeds mature within their pods. Lettuce seeds ripen in the flowers' capsules. Some seeds mature within fleshy fruits (tomatoes, squash, cucumbers).

The ideal time for gathering seeds varies from crop to crop. Melon seeds, for instance, are mature when the fruits are ready to eat, but summer squash and cucumbers should be left on the plant for weeks after you'd normally eat them. Generally, let vegetable garden seeds dry on the plant as long as possible.

For blooming plants, flower stalks that have dried and turned brown or seedpods that have turned from green to dark color are good indicators that seeds are mature. If you hear a rattle or if seeds fall when you tap lightly on flower stalks, it's probably time to harvest.

3. Try to harvest seeds on a sunny day, once the dew has evaporated, and remove all pulp and fiber from their surfaces. Certain seeds (such as lettuce, dill, and many flowers) will scatter when the seedhead is dry or lose seeds gradually as they ripen. You can shake their stalks every few days over a paper bag to check to see if they are ready and collect the ripe seed before it's lost. Sunflower, bean, and pepper seeds, on the other hand,

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are fun to harvest by hand. The chart below offers details on harvesting and storing many different types of seeds.

4. Before storing seeds, you'll need to make sure that they are completely dry by spreading them out on a flat surface (e.g., a screen or tray) in a dry, airy place. Seeds that are borne in fleshy fruits, such as tomatoes, should be rinsed or sit in water for several days and left to ferment before being spread out to dry (see chart, below, for details). Seeds that are borne on capsules or flowers may need to be separated from the chaff (seed covering and other debris) before storage. Have students do this by tossing seeds lightly on a screen or tray and blowing or letting a breeze remove the lighter debris.

5. Once seeds are dry, put them in envelopes and then in small glass jars (such as baby food containers) with tight lids, and label them. Some people prefer using plastic bags or just glass jars, which work fine if the seeds are absolutely dry. Store seeds where it's cool, dark, and dry. A refrigerator, freezer, or similar location is fine.

6. If your seeds are stored properly, they should last at least two to three years, if not longer, depending on the plant types.

Be sure to download the KidsGardening resource, [Seed Saving: Easy Annual Vegetables and Flowers](#), for advice on when and how to save seeds from your garden.

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