

A call to seed saving: Grow your own resilience, flavour and health from seed

This is the first of a couple of posts to help you start saving your own seeds and thus letting evolution do what happens naturally in the plant development – eventually they all want to go to seed.

Enhance the biodiversity and expression of your garden and optimize the use of your garden by growing food plants, flowers or even herbs for seed.

You can play with the possibility of adapting plants to your local conditions, and literally grow your own resilience, flavour and health from the seed up.



With only 10-15% of all organic Open Pollinated Seeds being produced in the UK of all seeds sold, so many seeds now being F1 hybrid and the prospect of more GMO /gene edited seeds on the horizon and the increased interest in the creation of organic and biodynamic gardens we have already experienced seed shortages.

Therefore, it's never been more urgent to make seed saving something that's part of our regular growing calendar, and for all of us to become seed guardians.

It's not difficult, it is fun and so rewarding – especially seeing the plant complete its natural life cycle (many vegetables have beautiful flowers and /or stunning seed heads).

There's no time like the present, so let's all get saving - please send in your seed saving adventures, questions, and share your own tips too.

Some of my own suggestions, tips and experiences

Now is the time of year that we see many plants go to flower and seed, fulfilling their life cycle.

Make sure when you save seeds to look for Open Pollinated varieties which were grown in organic or biodynamic farms or gardens.

If you are interested in giving it a go, the easiest way to start practicing saving seed is with flowering plants such as:

Calendula (Pot Marigold), Cosmos, Columbine, Aquilegia, Batchelor Button, Forget-Me-Not, Foxglove, French Marigold, Nasturtium, Poppy, Phacelia, Sunflower, Zinnia, etc.

If you want to get more enterprising you might want to even let mustard, rocket, radish, basil, coriander and other short-lived plants go to seed, provided they went through a stage of full leaf development and had plenty of time producing a crop for you first.

One of the DO NOTS is: Don't ever collect seed from plants which go to seed prematurely.

More about this in our next post.

What do we look for to collect vigorous and viable seed?

The main criterion is to make sure that the vegetative part of the plant is healthy and has a well-developed balanced growth, full green leaves which are well formed, a sturdy stem, and is disease and pest free. In short, just like natural selection, choose the strongest, most beautiful plants with the best expression of the variety (type), and add on your own objectives of what you want to select for.

E.g. earliness, fast growing, expression of flowers and colours, structure and size of the plant/vegetable, taste, productivity, resilience to frost or drought, and disease resistance.

The best results are obtained, when the seeds can ripen out on the plant. This is achieved either by having a dry spell, like we are experiencing right now, to dry naturally.

Other options are to cover them with plastic protection or we cut the whole stem of the plant, once natural drying of seed pods or cases have started and hang them upside down in a dry, warm and at least partially light filled place.

To help catch all the drying seeds, wrap a paper bag around the whole bundle of seed heads and to protect them from moisture at night when the temperature drops.

When we see the seeds looking fully dried and we can't press our thumb nails into the seed anymore, it is time to gently pull the seeds off by hand or beat the stems on the ground on a cloth to then collect them. If there are residues of seed husk or plant material, winnow the seed by putting into a dustpan and blowing gently over them and collecting the heavier seed closer to you on the cloth below and the lighter debris and plant impurities will be separated by being blown further away.

Then simply put the dried seeds into a glass jar or paper envelopes (label name and year) and store them somewhere dry and dark, ideally with a temperature range between 6-10 degrees centigrade, and where there is very little fluctuation of environmental conditions, and away from animals and insects.

I've found in the past putting them in a box with sphagnum peat, coir or other shredded residue from dried bracken will protect them best from changing environmental conditions and preserve their viability and life forces better.

Most seeds will last many years, if they are kept in a cool and protected environment, with the exception of Parsnips.

Next time we'll look at saving seeds from fruiting plants

Happy gardening with the beauty of the flowering world,

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