

## Fact Sheet: How to Save Seed

By Lindy Sharpe

Saving seed is easier than you think! The advice here applies to most seed-saving, but different vegetables require different treatment, and knowing their quirks before you start prevents frustration later on. For more detailed instructions, see the references listed.

1. Find out where the seeds are! Sometimes they are in the edible bits of plants (such as tomatoes and beans). But for many vegetables, such as cabbages, turnips and onions, you would normally harvest the plant before it had produced any seeds. In this case, you need to leave a few plants in the ground to flower and produce seeds.
2. Choose the best plants. Collect seeds from the ones you liked best, in terms of how they grew and tasted, and always choose healthy specimens.
3. Know what you sow. Label the seeds you collect, and re-label as you change containers.
3. Control your crosses. Some plants, such as tomatoes, self-pollinate, so you can collect seeds from your favourite variety and grow similar ones next year. Some plants are promiscuous, and will cross-pollinate freely with neighbouring varieties. You can control this by segregating the plants – for methods and distances, see the references below.
4. Treat them right. Different vegetables require different seed saving techniques – to learn what works for specific vegetables, see the references below.
5. Allow the seeds to ripen fully before you collect them. Either leave the plant in the ground, or cut the whole plant when the seeds are nearly ripe, and then dry it indoors.
6. Preferably collect them on a dry day. In any case, be sure to **DRY THE SEEDS THOROUGHLY**, or they may germinate in storage or go mouldy. Spread them on a plate and leave somewhere cool and airy. When they are dry, bake some rice in the oven till it is bone dry, then put it into a jam jar, put the lid on and let it cool. Put the seeds in a mesh bag (eg the toe of an old pair of tights), pop it in the jar, and leave for a week. The dry rice will suck the water out of the seeds (if you leave them longer, they may become *too* dry). Transfer seeds to a clean, dry jar for long-term storage.
7. Properly dried seeds will keep for several years at a steady, cool temperature (such as in the door of your fridge), in an airtight container. Don't store them in the garden shed, as the alternations of light/dark, hot/cold may wake them up.

For more information, see:

*Basic Seedsaving for Beginners*, a free leaflet available from the Real Seed Company's website, [www.realseeds.co.uk](http://www.realseeds.co.uk)

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*Back Garden Seed Saving*, by Sue Stickland, available from [www.eco-logicbooks.com](http://www.eco-logicbooks.com) for £12.95 plus p&p.