

Seed Saving Overview for Common Vegetables

Source: High Mowing Organic Seed Co – www.highmowingseeds.com (Resources Segment of Website)

Melons - SEED SAVING INSTRUCTIONS:

Insect pollinated. Take caution unless you are hand pollinating, as many summer squash varieties are the same species as many pumpkins and winter squashes. Different varieties of the same species need to be isolated by 1/4 mile to prevent cross-pollination. Barriers such as tree lines, woods or buildings existing between the fields can reduce this distance. Treat summer squash the same as usually done for winter storage of squashes and pumpkins, allowing summer squash varieties to grow to a large size with a hard outside skin. After all squashes have reached this stage, harvest and let them sit for a period of after-ripening for 3-6 weeks or up to several months. Remove the seeds, rinse in water and dry. Use of a 1/2" and 1/4" screen can help with cleaning. Squash seeds remain viable for 6 years under cool and dry storage conditions.

Beans - SEED SAVING INSTRUCTIONS:

Self-pollinated. Beans do not readily cross between varieties so one need not separate different varieties by more than five feet. If crossed, the seed coat of the bean will show variation in its first year due to the maternal dominance of the seed coat genetics (this is similar in corn). When planting, increase row and plant spacing to allow for greater air circulation and space for a mature plant. Pods should be papery and dry when harvested. Harvest by pulling up the entire plant. Windrow in the field or lay on a tarp in a dry place like a barn or greenhouse. When seeds are fully dry they are ready for threshing. Your fingernail should not be able to make an imprint on a fully dry seed. Thresh by flailing, jumping on pods, or shell by hand. Use a 1/2" screen on top of a 1/4" screen to clean the seed. Bean seed can remain viable for up to 4 years under cool and dry storage conditions.

Beets - SEED SAVING INSTRUCTIONS:

Wind pollinated biennial. Different beet varieties must be isolated by 1/4 mile or be separated by a major obstruction such as woods or a building to keep them from cross pollinating. Because beets are a biennial they will need to be stored over the winter in a cool area with high humidity or in areas with mild winters they can be left outside. In the spring transplant the entire beet to its original depth, 8"-12" apart in rows 18"-36" apart. They will grow in height and eventually flower. Seeds are ready to harvest when they are dry. The entire seed stalk can be brought in to dry further before threshing. Use a 1/4" and 1/8" screen to help with cleaning. Beet seeds can remain viable for 4-6 years under cool and dry storage conditions.

Tomatoes - SEED SAVING INSTRUCTIONS:

Self pollinated. Different tomato varieties rarely cross with one another so isolation distances are not generally required. The seed is mature when the tomato itself is ripe. Squeeze the seeds and juice into a jar and add about the same amount of water. Allow this liquid to ferment in a warm place for 3-5 days, stirring daily, until the seeds have sunk to the bottom of the jar. Rinse the seeds and allow to dry on a paper plate or cloth. Use of a 1/8" screen can help with cleaning. Tomato seeds remain viable for 4-10 years under cool and dry storage conditions.

Broccoli - SEED SAVING INSTRUCTIONS:

Insect pollinated biennial (can work as an annual). Different broccoli varieties need to be isolated by ¼ mile to prevent cross pollination. Barriers such as tree lines, woods or buildings in between varieties can allow for shorter distances. Transplant in early spring and allow plants to flower after forming a compact head. Broccoli seed can take a very long time to mature and may require some season extension. Gather seed stalks when seed pods are dry being careful to prevent losses due to shattering. Use a 1/8" screen to help with cleaning. Broccoli seed remains viable for 5 years under cool and dry storage conditions.

Onions - SEED SAVING INSTRUCTIONS:

Insect pollinated. Bunching onions are biennials or perennials and generally will not make seed their first year. Over-winter outside in most climates. Some staking may be necessary to hold up the top heavy seed stalks. Harvest seed heads when 1/2 of the pods are open and showing black seeds. Allow to dry and seeds will be easily shaken out. Use 1/8" screen to help with cleaning. Onion seeds will remain viable for 1-3 years.

Spinach - SEED SAVING INSTRUCTIONS:

Wind pollinated. Spinach varieties must be isolated by 1/4 mile to prevent cross pollination by wind. Physical barriers such as tree lines, buildings or woods may make it possible to use a shorter distance. Allow plants to bolt and set seed. Some staking may be necessary as plants may reach 3' in height. When seeds are dry, harvest the entire plant and thresh on a tarp. A 1/2 " screen on top of a 1/4" and 1/8" is helpful for cleaning. Spinach seed remains viable for 3-5 years under cool and dry storage conditions.

Chard - SEED SAVING INSTRUCTIONS:

Wind pollinated biennial. Different chard varieties must be isolated by ¼ mile from each other and from any beets that are flowering as well. Barriers such as tree lines, woods or buildings between varieties may allow for shorter isolation distances. In the fall, dig up the plants and cut off any leaves about an inch above the crowns. Transplant into bins of damp sand or sawdust and store at 32-40°F under high humidity. In mild climates chard may survive with protection outside or in a greenhouse. In the spring, transplant outside 6"-10" apart in rows 16"-24" apart. Be prepared to stake or trellis the plants as they can grow to several feet in height. Harvest seed stalks as they dry and thresh with a flail or by stomping. After threshed use a ½" and ¼" screen to help with cleaning. Chard seed remains viable for 4-6 years under cool and dry storage conditions.

Cucumbers - SEED SAVING INSTRUCTIONS:

Insect pollinated. Cucumber varieties need to be isolated by ¼ mile to ensure that cross pollination doesn't occur. Physical barriers such as tree lines, buildings or woods may make shorter distances adequate. Allow the cucumbers to remain on the vine and get swollen and yellow or brown in color. Harvest and allow them to sit in a dry, cool place for 3-6 weeks for after-ripening. This helps considerably with the maturing of the seed. Remove the seeds and add about the same amount of water as you have seeds. Allow to lightly ferment for 2-3 days in a warm place, stirring daily. Pour off debris and flat seeds while leaving large and mature seeds to remain at the bottom of the container. Dry seeds on a cloth or screen. If needed, use a 1/4" or 1/8" screen to help with cleaning. Cucumber seeds can remain viable for up to 10 years under cool and dry storage conditions.

Peppers - SEED SAVING INSTRUCTIONS:

Self pollinated but can be up to 20% insect pollinated. 200-300 feet is sufficient for isolation between varieties. Peppers need to be red (or whatever color they ripen to) and can be cut open and the seeds dried on

a plate or cloth. Use a 1/8" screen to help with cleaning. Pepper seeds can remain viable for 3 years under cool and dry storage conditions.

Lettuce - SEED SAVING INSTRUCTIONS:

Self-pollinated. Lettuce varieties will not cross pollinate with each other even at short distances, but beware of any wild lettuce which can cross with lettuce. Allow plants to "bolt" and eventually flower. Under wet conditions lettuce plants may need to be covered with a rain cover or grown in a greenhouse to prevent fungus from infecting the plant and seed heads. Carefully shake the seedheads into a paper bag to allow the mature seeds to be collected while leaving the immature seeds and flowers to keep growing. Gather every few days until no more seeds remain. Also, you can simply harvest the entire plant when about half of the seeds are mature and allow the rest to mature inside by standing up the plants in a box and on a cloth or tarp. Use an 1/8" screen to help with cleaning. Lettuce seed can remain viable for 3 years under cool and dry storage conditions.

Corn - SEED SAVING INSTRUCTIONS:

Wind pollinated. Corn must either be hand pollinated or isolated by ¼ mile between varieties. However, if tree lines, woods or structures separate the corn varieties then shorter distances may be sufficient. A minimum of 100 plants should be used for saving seed to maintain the maximum amount of genetic diversity of the variety. Allow the ears to dry on the plant and harvest when husks are dry and papery. Once harvested some additional drying under cover or indoors may be necessary before they can be shelled easily. Once shelled use a ½" screen on top of a ¼" screen to help with cleaning. Corn seed can remain viable for 5-10 years under cool and dry storage conditions.

Peas - SEED SAVING INSTRUCTIONS:

Self pollinated. Pea varieties do not require any distance for isolation. Peas being grown for seed must be trellised or else mold and dampness will rot the seed pods. Allow the pods to grow large and tough and eventually they and the plants will begin to dry down. Harvest by picking individual dry pods or by pulling the entire plants out of the ground and off the trellis. Shell by hand or thresh by flailing or stomping on a tarp. A 1/2" screen on top of a 1/4" screen will help with cleaning once the peas are threshed out of the pods. Pea seed will remain viable for 3 years under cool and dry storage conditions.

Leeks - SEED SAVING INSTRUCTIONS:

Insect pollinated. Leeks are biennials and generally will not make seed their first year. Either store the roots in a root cellar or protect for over- wintering outside. In the spring, transplant roots outside about 6" apart in rows about 12" apart. Some staking may be necessary to hold up the top heavy seed stalks. Harvest seed heads when 1/2 of the pods are open and showing black seeds. Allow to dry and seeds will be easily shaken out. Use 1/8" screen to help with cleaning. Allium seeds will remain viable for 1-3 years.

Garlic & Potatoes – SEED SAVING INSTRUCTIONS:

These crops are easiest to grow by re-planting a portion of your harvest, as they will clone themselves in the soil. 1 clove of garlic will grow into a full head of garlic, while a piece of potato with several 'eyes' will grow into a new potato plant and produce tubers. Set aside the largest, nicest specimens from your harvest each season and your personal variety will get better and better!