

Buck Mountain Garden Club

3/12/2023 – Program: Basic (Flower) Seed Saving

Dee Walsh/Valerie Shepherd

1) Why Save Seeds?

-Save Money (Ex: 1200 Blanket Flower/Gaillardia seeds sell for \$7.95 on Amazon)

-Fun (Can do it with friends, and in a closed/comfortable space)

-Interesting to Learn About New Types of Flowers (Such as seeds from a bouquet!)

-Volume (Can get *lots* of seeds, more over time – enough to share!)

-Sentimental Reasons (I think of my Dad when I see Marigolds, and of my friend Carl when I see Zinnias or Hollyhocks, and of Valerie when I see Well, so *many* things in my garden!)

Note: Seeds can be shared, but probably not sold as a product, because when saving seeds at home, it's impossible to guarantee that they will grow true to size/color, and that the seeds are not (inadvertently) mixed with other types of seeds, and/or that they are not otherwise contaminated (such as with fungus, mold, etc.)

2) What Seeds to Save?

-Almost any flowering plant that has a discernible seed, and some that don't!

-I focus on self-seeding annuals and true perennials, including: Marigold, Zinnia, Gomphrena/Globe Amaranth, Celosia/Cockscomb, Hollyhock, Black-Eyed Susan (Rudbeckia) and Variants, Mexican Hat (aka Upright Prairie Coneflower), Coneflower (Echinacea), Rose Campion, Faux Sunflower, Daisy, Butter Daisy (Melampodium), Queen Anne's Lace, Yarrow, Hibiscus, Rose-of-Sharon, and Blackberry Lily.

-Anything you wish to have more of in your garden in future years.

-Select OUT what you don't want (in my case, it was "Zinderella" zinnias and white/cream marigolds.)

3) Where *ARE* Those Seeds, Anyway?

-In husks (Marigold, Sweet William)

-In pods (Blackberry Lily, Canna Lily, Nigella, Rose Campion, Hollyhock, Cleome)

-On stems or stem supporting foliage (Celosia/Cockscomb)

-In the core of the flowerhead (Coneflower, Zinnia, Rudbeckia, Melampodium)

-Who knows? Some are too tiny to see!

4) Deciding When to Harvest

-Best to take from flowers that are naturally spent/withered

-Seeds should be mature but not yet released naturally onto the ground/in the air

It's a tricky balance, trying to let seeds mature naturally vs. having them eaten by animals or strewn by the wind!

-Avoid harvesting after a rain or heavy dew; the flower heads should be DRY.

-Anytime after a killing frost (even if not yet fully spent)

-Mature seeds are usually dark(er). Examples shown today: Marigold, zinnia, gomphrena, canna lily, hollyhock, blackberry lily.

5) Harvesting Methods

-Cut/Pinch off heads

-Pull up whole plant (good for measuring height if you don't have time to measure and sort on the fly)

-Make use of sheets, tarps, buckets – for laying out piles/sorting

6) Drying/Storing Your Seeds

-**Ventilation** to prevent molding is your #1 priority!

-If seeds/seedheads are clumped or stored together, separate them as much as possible – for example, stir a large bucket of seeds with a broom handle or your hands on a regular basis.

-Drying racks are readily available. Examples of commercially available racks, circular hangers are attached. I make my own by using almost anything at hand: old window/door screens (Habitat for Humanity is a great source), mesh/sheer fabric, meshed packing materials, stringing sheaves of flowers up-side-down over catch basins – there's no limit to the imagination for ways to dry seeds!

-If there's a great deal of foliage, and you are risking a mold problem, consider trimming the petals off. This is time-consuming (but does have a certain relaxing Zen factor to it.) Another potential disadvantage is losing some seed along the way.

-Seed heads should be fully dried before “processing” them (collecting the seed), and they can stay on the drying racks for months, until it's convenient for you to open them.

-If you're storing seeds in a garage or shed that is sometimes exposed to air (like when the garage doors are open), be aware that wind/drafts can be a problem – you don't want all your hard work to blow away in the breeze!

-Fans are useful in the more humid summer months to keep the humidity down.

-IF you notice any mold in a group of seedheads, remove them and surrounding heads and dispose of them promptly. They pose a threat to all your other seeds, and they're not worth trying to save.

7) "Processing" Your Seeds – Getting the Seeds Out of the Flowers and Ready to Sow!

-For seeds in husks, you can break them by hand, or crush them. Stomping them is pretty cathartic.

-For seeds in pods, there's little else to do than to open them by hand.

-For seeds in a core, you can easily break them by hand, or you can crush them.

-For seeds on stems/in foliage, hanging them upside-down will usually release most of them. You can get the rest by shaking/tapping/beating them.

-For seeds that are nestled in flower-heads, and that are so tiny you can hardly see them, you can just shake the seed-head to release the seeds.

-For stomping: Try using a big box. Tape the voids/corners. If you want, line with an old sheet. Dump seedheads into the box, put on a big pair of boots, and channel Lucille Ball stomping grapes. It works.

-For beating: Get a big, heavy plastic jug, add a few golf balls and seed heads and shake it vigorously. The golf balls (or smooth roundish stones) beat the seeds right out (and occasionally they'll crack the jug, too – be careful.)

-For hand-opening husks, pods, and very compact flower-heads: Use lightweight rubber (exam) gloves, get a good chair and maybe an audiobook, and go to it. Very compact heads or spiky heads (such as Rudbeckia and Coneflower) might require the assist of a pincer-like hand tool to pull apart the heads.

8) Final Thoughts:

-If you're invested in sowing flowers from seeds, I'd suggest taking a lot of notes, and photos during each step of the process (and *labeling* them). This will help you remember as you go along.

-Gifts of seeds are most often very welcome (and inexpensive to share!)

-Giving a bouquet of flowers back to someone who has given *you* the seeds is especially meaningful.

-Be aware of the "Bear in a China Shop" syndrome. I am, myself, most often that bear – I cannot tell you how many times I've knocked over a tray of seeds I just sorted, or dropped a bucket and mixed seeds here and there..... best just to take it slow and easy, especially if your space is cramped.

-Unused envelopes, such as from organizations requesting donation, make great seed-sharing containers. I also save paper bags from just about everywhere: pharmacy bags, fast-food bags, you name it. All can be re-used. I also save small pill bottles, jugs (like M&M containers) and so on for the larger stuff – but those should be *ventilated*. Paper products are best for long-term storage, as they "breathe" more readily. Never use Ziploc or plastic bags!

Useful References (Only a few of *many*) — feel free to recommend any others that you like!

The Complete Guide to Seed Saving by Robert Gough and Cheryl Moore-Gough, 2011, Storey Publishing

Annuals, Perennials & Bulbs by Anne Halpin, 2001, Creative Homeowner Press, pp. 39, 117, & multiple others specific to flower types

The Gardener's A-Z Guide to Growing Flowers from Seed to Bloom by Eileen Powell, 2004, Potting-Bench Reference Books

The Flower Garden: How to Grow Flowers from Seed by Clare Foster and Sabina Rüber, 2019, Laurence King Publishing

Garden Flowers From Seed by Christopher Lloyd and Graham Rice, 1991, Penguin Putnam Publishing

From: <https://www.almanac.com/how-save-flower-seeds-next-year> and in [printable/PDF format](#)