

The aim of seed saving is to save **healthy** seed that comes **true to type** – this means the seed will grow into plants that have the same characteristics as the parent plants – they look the same, grow the same and (importantly!) taste the same. To ensure your seed comes true to type there are 3 key points to remember:

- ① only save seed from open pollinated varieties. Seed saved from F1 hybrids will grow into plants that all look different
- ② only save seed from plants that have the right characteristics for that variety
- ③ make sure your parent plants are not pollinated by another variety of the same species

To ensure the seed you save is healthy it is important to be able to recognise the pests and diseases that may affect your plants. Plants should be inspected regularly and seed saved only from those that are healthy and disease-free.


Ready to learn more?

If you are interested in learning more about the fascinating world of seed, seed saving and seed sowing then why not join us for a course or workshop. Delivered by an experienced seed professional, courses are available both online and in person in South Cambridgeshire.

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A Quick Guide to Seed Saving

Saving seed is easy and rewarding but to get the most out of it we need to be aware of a few essential principles. This short guide introduces these ideas and takes you through the three crucial stages of successful seed saving.

The guide was written with saving seed of vegetable varieties in mind, but the same principles apply to saving seed of flower varieties. Saving seed from wildflowers and trees is slightly different (and more straightforward!), take a look at our other courses on the back page to find out more.

Happy Seed Saving!



1 Planning

Successful seed saving starts with a plan! It's important to have done some research and understand something of the biology of the plants you will be saving seed from so that you take the necessary steps at the correct time, as this varies from species to species.

Key questions to consider are:

How are my plants pollinated and does pollination need to be managed?

Can I recognise off types and diseases?

Do I need a certain number of plants to maintain a healthy population?

Labelling and record keeping should also be part of your planning – it's really important to keep track of which varieties have been sown and where.

2 Pollinating

Pollination is the most critical stage for successful seed saving. Without it, there will be no seed to save, but managed incorrectly and the seed you save will not come true to type.

For self-pollinating species like tomatoes and peas there is little to do except ensure your growing conditions are right for flowering, choose the plants that are healthiest and most typical of that variety then clearly mark them for saving.

For cross pollinating species like courgette and parsnip though, it means preventing unwanted pollination by other varieties of the same species, either by physical isolation with covers or nets or by ensuring a large enough distance between varieties.

3 Processing

Harvested seed needs to be processed carefully to ensure that it will store properly and grow when sown. This starts by taking care to harvest seed only once it is fully ripe, then cleaning, drying and storing it correctly before it is sown.

Cleaning means separating seed from pods, fruits, chaff and other plant debris. The method used varies between species and although seeds have evolved to be tough care should still be taken not to damage them in the process.

Once cleaned, seed needs to be *thoroughly* dried so that it enters a dormant state ready to be stored in cool, dry conditions where, depending on species, it may remain viable for several years.