

# Morgan County Master Gardeners

*"Helping Others Grow"*

[mcmastergardeners.org](http://mcmastergardeners.org)

## HOW TO SAVE SEEDS 101

### DEFINITIONS:

- **HEIRLOOM or OPEN POLLINATED SEED** - Plants that come out true to type when saved properly. That means they will be like the parent plant.
- **HYBRID SEED** - Plant that has parents of two different varieties. (Cross pollinated). Plants that come from a hybrid plant will not be the same as their parent plant.
- **DISTANCE** - the optimum space needed for saving seed to be true to the parent plant.
- **POPULATION** - the number of plants needed for genetic diversity within plant variety.

### WHY DO YOU WANT TO SAVE SEEDS?

- **PRESERVE HEIRLOOMS** - Purity (seed will be true to parent plant) matters.
  - Want to follow best practices to maintain varietal purity
  - Need to isolate or hand-pollinate to prevent cross-pollination
- **CLIMATE CRISIS & FOOD SECURITY** - Purity is not important. (Seed does not have to be like parent)
  - Be Adventurous, mix it up! Allow things to cross pollinate. Communicate that you are on an adventure so folks know that these will not be uniform or like their parents (true to type).
  - Label to reflect cross, ex. Windsor x Negreta Fava. (x = cross)
- **FUN & SAVES \$!** - Purity is not important.
  - Breed varieties for the future.
  - Enjoyment. Choose your own adventure!

### BEGINNING VEGETABLES TO GROW FOR SEED SAVING/SHARING:

- The easiest seeds to save for sharing are the heirloom type of **TOMATOES, BEANS, PEAS & LETTUCE**. These plants are **extremely self-pollinating and reliably come out like their parents**. The exception for beans are runners and favas.
  - **These species usually turn out like their parents without having to isolate by distance.**
  - You will need 6 plants to meet the population size for beans & peas (25 is ideal). Lettuce can seed from only 1 plant but 10 is ideal. Tomatoes can also meet population size with one plant (5-10 is ideal).
  - Hybrid seed is a blend of 2 or more varieties of a species and will not produce true to type. The offspring will be a mix of the two or more parents. Do not use hybrid seed for seed sharing.
  - So you can plant as usual to save HEIRLOOM type seed of tomatoes, beans, peas & lettuce for sharing seed.
  - **Always save seeds from at the healthiest plants.** Try to save from as many plants as you can to increase genetic diversity.

## HOW TO HARVEST VEGETABLES FOR SEED:

- **DRY SEED**
  - Beans & Peas - Allow beans and peas to dry on their pods on plants before harvesting and storing. Beans and peas are ready for storage when they shatter when hit with a hammer. Store in a cool dark place with low moisture. Beans can be frozen.
  - Lettuce - Harvest when about half of the flowers heads have turned white and fluffy. Cut off the stalk and put upside down in a brown paper bag to dry more. Label bag with common and variety name. Lettuce is winnowed. Kitchen sieves can be used to help clean the seed. Store in a cool dark place with low moisture.
- **WET SEED** (have a gel coat)
  - Tomatoes - Allow fruit to ripen fully. Cut tomato on its horizontal axis (across the middle), squeeze or scoop out seeds. Place seed and juice in a jar, covering them with non chlorinated water, and let sit for a few days (2-3) to ferment. (Make sure you label!) Scoop out seeds that float and discard. Mold will form and it will look disgusting! Rinse, drain, let seeds dry on a paper plate, then store them in a labeled wrapper in a cool dark place with low moisture.

## HOW TO LABEL VEGETABLES FOR SEED:

- Your plant seeds should be placed in uniform envelopes with 10 - 20 seeds in each envelope.
- All plant seeds should be labeled with the plant name and variety, year saved and the name of the grower. Ex: Tomato (species); Cherokee Purple (variety), 2020 (yr), Jane Smith (grower)
- More information can be found for each plant online at the Seed Library or Sponsor site. This could be your local Library website, your county Master Gardener website or other websites.
- If plants you saved seeds from exhibit some good characteristics, record that information.

## HOW TO STORE SEEDS:

- Seeds should be stored in cool, dark, dry conditions.

- Generally storage temperature is adequate if below 50 degrees. Always keep your seeds below 80 degrees, the temperature seeds die off quickly.
- Absolute darkness is best for storing seeds. However, seed storage is adequate if direct sunlight or bright artificial light is avoided.
- Dryness is the most important factor of storing seeds.
  - Most seeds can be stored in drier climates (lower humidity) without special protection.
  - Plastic bags alone will not be adequate for storing seeds in a refrigerator or freezer. Seeds can be stored in glass containers for refrigeration or freezing but allow jars to warm up before opening to prevent moist air from condensing on the inside walls of the jar.
  - Do not vacuum pack seeds because they are a living organism.

### **HOW TO DISTRIBUTE SAVED SEED:**

- Share seed with friends and families
- Share seed with local seed library
- Exchange seeds with another library out of your area
- Supporting communities after a crisis to reinvigorate their seed