



### Saving Seeds

By Linda Sanford

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Growing plants and preserving their seeds is an ancient human practice. When you have grown plants for seed, keep a bit of the wealth for yourself and then share the bounty with friends and neighbors and green-thumbed strangers.

Some seeds are relatively easy to save -- peppers, for example. Just remove the seeds from a pepper, dry them on a paper towel, and store them in a closed jar to completely exclude moisture. Tomato seeds are a little more work: soak them in a glass of water until their pulp dissolves, and the seeds sink to the bottom. Then dry them on a fine-meshed screen and store them the same way as peppers. Other easy seeds to save are beans: just dry the seeds in the pods.

Some seeds are tricky. Squash must be fully mature before harvested for seed. This means that summer squash must be left on the vine until the outer shell hardens. Allow the hardened squash to cure an additional three to four weeks. Thereafter, open the shell, scoop out the seeds, and rinse in a strainer with warm, running water. Dry with a towel and spread out the seeds to complete drying. To collect seeds from flower heads, put the heads in a paper bag and shake out the seeds. For seeds inside fruits, allow the fruit to remain on the vine or stem longer than normal, but collect the seeds before the fruit rots.

Remember, even heirloom plants may not yield seeds that are true to form. If different varieties are planted close together, their flowers may cross-pollinate. The resulting progeny may be a surprise. Keep wind-pollinated plants isolated from each other by at least 50 feet. Hybrid cultivars either have sterile seeds, or if they do germinate, will not mirror their parents' characteristics.

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Store all collected seeds in a cool, dry, dark place in closed glass containers. Do not store them in plastic because of potential moisture damage. One tablespoon of dried milk powder can be enclosed with the seed, wrapped in a facial tissue, which acts as a desiccant. Or, add a packet of silica gel.

Seed Savers Exchange ([www.seedsavers.org](http://www.seedsavers.org))\* is a non-profit organization of gardeners who save and share heirloom seeds. Members have access to unique varieties of heirloom vegetable, fruits, grains, flowers, and herbs. What I like about this organization is that we can still enjoy the same varieties that our grandparents grew, such as the “outhouse hollyhock” (*Alcea rosea*) found on farmsteads for over a century.

Seed saving is fun, once you are drawn to the habit. It becomes part of the rhythm of growing your own food and flowers, and gives any gardener a sense of self-sufficiency. It also fosters food sufficiency for the planet. Every season, keep a measure of seed for yourself and for the benefit of all beings, give the rest of it away.

Join UCCE Master Gardener Steve Savage this Saturday, October 25 at the free UCCE Master Gardener of El Dorado County class on Yellow Starthistle. Learn about this invasive weed that has taken over large portions of California's range land and urban landscape; understand its origins, how it moves, why it is so difficult to control. Methods how to overcome the weed and establish an effective, long-term control program will be covered in depth. Class is from 9:00 am to noon at the El Dorado County Library, 345 Fair Lane, Placerville.

UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado are available to answer home gardening questions in their office at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville from Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon. Walk-ins are welcome, or call [\(530\) 621-5512](tel:5306215512). For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our Master Gardener website at [http://ucanr.edu/sites/EDC\\_Master\\_Gardeners/](http://ucanr.edu/sites/EDC_Master_Gardeners/). Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at <http://ucanr.edu/mgenews/>. You can also find us on Facebook.

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