



ASK A MASTER GARDENER

HARVESTING SEEDS FROM THE GARDEN

By Trish Grenfell, Placer County Master Gardener

Q I am wondering if I can save money next year by using seeds from my current garden plants.

A The frugal gardener should be outside searching plants that are going to seed. That's right, the seeds are sitting right in front of us, waiting to be harvested!

As wonderful as this may seem, you do take a risk when you use these harvested seeds rather than those you purchase. Your garden seeds are the result of random, open pollination by bees and other insects or other natural agents (birds butterflies) and may not produce plants identical to their parents (i.e., hybrid varieties). Purchased seeds are guaranteed to have the desirable traits of the specific, selected parent plants from which they were bred. Self-pollinating plants (i.e., tomatoes) offer the best opportunity for a home gardener to save seed, because the pollen is transferred directly to the stigma within the flower, but even that is not fool proof. That said, you certainly can't beat the price, and the adventure can add to the fun.

If left alone, the seeds will dry and drop around the original plant. (If you have a self-seeding plant, you can let them seed on their own. It may get a bit crowded, but you can dig up the 'babies' and replant them.) When you want to collect the seeds, don't remove the spent flowers. Instead, let nature take its course, and keep an eye out for seedpod development. One removal method is to wait until the plant is brown and then just "shake" the seeds out, but a more efficient method is to snip the old flowers/fruit. Different plants produce seed in different forms. Sometimes they're encased in fruit and can be collected when the fruit is allowed to dry (collect from very ripe but not rotting fruit). Non-fruit seeds develop in a papery pod after the bloom fades. Seed heads need to be collected before these pods naturally release the seed. Note: do not harvest seeds on a wet day.

Allow your seeds to air-dry indoors at room temperature as they are laid out on a flat surface. When dry, place them in a paper bag or envelope and mark the bag with the plant name. Keep the seed packets in a cool, dark, and dry space over the winter. The best spot would be a moisture proof container inside your refrigerator, but a desk drawer works also. Seed moisture and storage temperature are the most important factors in determining how long seed can be stored. The drier the seeds are, the longer they will store. Vegetable and flower seeds may be kept for one year without appreciable decrease in germination.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION



PLACER COUNTY

11477 E Avenue
Auburn, CA 95603
(530) 889-7385

E-Mail: ceplacer@ucdavis.edu

The University of California, in accordance with applicable Federal and State law and University policy, does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, disability, age, medical condition (cancer-related), ancestry, marital status, citizenship, sexual orientation, or status as a Vietnam-era veteran or special disabled veteran. Inquiries regarding the University's nondiscrimination policies may be directed to the Affirmative Action Director, University of California, Agriculture and Natural Resources, 1111 Franklin, 6th Floor, Oakland, California 94607-5200. (510) 987-0096. United States Department of Agriculture, University of California, Placer & Nevada Counties cooperating.

NEVADA COUNTY

255 So Auburn
Grass Valley, CA 95945
(530) 273-4563

E-Mail: cenevada@ucdavis.edu