

Collect and sow your own seeds



Save money by collecting seeds to grow your own flowers and vegetables. You can even sell your flowers and vegetables to earn a little extra money.

Most people forget that hiding inside the outer protective covering of a seed is a delicate and minute plant that requires moisture and warmth to germinate. Growing plants from seeds is a fulfilling and exciting activity that can produce wonderful home-grown additions to your garden.

Annuals are plants that grow for one season only, so unless you collect seeds from them, you will have to buy more the following season. By collecting seeds from old plants you can grow your own batch of annuals for the next season. For a beginner, the easiest seeds to collect are from plants such as aster, calendula, cleome, cornflower, cosmos, Euphorbia palustris, marigold, Shirley poppy, sweet peas and zinnia. Annuals can be grown throughout the year, so by carefully planning your seed collection and planting, you can make sure your garden blooms with colour all year-round.

Sowing seeds

Once you have collected seeds from the desired plants you may need to store them until the suitable time for planting. Seeds should be stored in a cool, dry place to prevent them from germinating or developing mould. It is best to never store seeds for longer than 12 months. Once you are ready to germinate your seeds check whether they can be sown into the ground directly, or whether they need to be sown into seed trays first.

STEP BY STEP GUIDE FOR SEED GERMINATION IN TRAYS

1. Use a good seedling soil, or mixture of garden loam, river sand and well-sifted compost, in which to sow your seeds in seed trays.
2. Fill seed trays with moist soil mixture and level it off without compacting the soil.
3. Sprinkle the seeds thinly over the top of the soil and press gently into the soil. It is best to cover larger seeds with a thin layer of soil mixture, while leaving smaller seeds uncovered.
4. Make sure the soil surface remains moist. To help retain moisture you can place glass or plastic over the seed tray.
5. Keep the seed tray in a warm place but out of direct sunlight.
6. For sun-loving plants ensure that you gradually expose the growing seedlings to more sunlight.
7. Your seedlings are ready to be planted out when they appear sturdy and a second set of leaves appear.

You can follow the same principles listed above when sowing seeds directly into the ground.

Growing veggies

Certain vegetables are easier to grow from seed than others for example, peas, beans and mielies. Seeds from tomatoes, zucchini, cucumbers or pumpkins can only be collected after a simple fermentation process; you only need to ferment one or two of these vegetables to provide you with enough seeds for the coming season, as follows:

- Let one or two tomatoes, zucchini, cucumbers or a pumpkin ripen on the plant until it is over-ripe and becoming soft.
- Pick the ripe vegetable, carefully cut it open and scoop out the seeds with a spoon, placing them in a bowl of lukewarm water.
- After a couple of days, the mixture will begin to ferment.
- Carefully wash off the fermented pulp.
- Put the seeds in a strainer, rinse again with clean water and place them on a cotton cloth to dry.
- Store seeds in an airtight container, such as a plastic pillbox. Remember to label the container with the name of the plant and year of collection.
- It is best to collect new seeds every year to ensure successful germination.

Follow these hints for good seed collecting:

- Let only the strongest plant with the most beautiful flowers go to seed.
- Do not harvest the first beans and peas to appear. This is because the first pods are the most vigorous and best for future cultivation.
- Mark these pods with string and allow them to mature on the plant. Once they have grown to full size, pull up the plant and hang it in a well ventilated place away from the sun.
- Protect the heads of sunflowers with a cotton cloth to prevent birds feasting on the seeds before you can harvest them.
- Seed contained in pods are best preserved in their pods. Only store pods that are free of blemishes.
- Collect delicate flower seeds by carefully putting the seed head into a container, such as an empty ice cream tub. Gently shake or rub the seeds into the container.
- With zinnias, marigolds and calendulas, cut off the flower stem, place on a newspaper in a cardboard box and allow to dry in a protected area.
- Always collect seeds on a dry day.

Photo by Phil Bende



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