

A Few Seed Saving Tips for Some Common Veggie Seeds



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Use Open-Pollinated Varieties - Only seeds from open-pollinated (not hybrid!) plants will produce the same crop next year. The packet that the original seeds arrived in should indicate whether the variety is open-pollinated or hybrid.

Peppers Pepper seeds are super easy to save! The seeds are mature after the peppers have changed color, indicating final ripeness. Cut the peppers open, scrape out the seeds onto a plate (save the flesh for eating!). Let the seeds dry in a non-humid, shaded place, testing them occasionally until they break rather than bend. Dry all wet seeds on a glass or ceramic plate. Spread the seeds evenly over the surface of the plate and stir twice daily to ensure even drying and to keep them from clumping together. Don't dry seeds on paper plates or paper towels. A food dehydrator set at 85 degrees works well, but don't dry seeds in a warm oven or any place the temperature exceeds 95 degrees.

Muskmelons ("Cantaloupes") Cut muskmelons open, scoop the seeds into a strainer, rinse, and set out to dry. For watermelons, place the seeds into a strainer and add a dash of dishwashing liquid to remove any sugar left on the seeds. Gently wash the seeds, rinse and dry.

Winter squashes Carefully cut open the squash to expose the seed cavity. To avoid cutting seeds, insert the knife as far as necessary to cut through the flesh and then cut around the circumference of the squash. Pull the seeds from the fibers, rinse, and dry. You don't need to cut the squash until you are ready to eat it: Seeds can be saved from most winter squashes many months after harvest, although a few of the long-storage varieties may have sprouted seeds inside after six months or so.

Summer Squash You'll need to let summer squashes ripen past the tender stage. When you can't dent the squash with a fingernail, the fruit is at the right stage for seed saving. Pick it, cut it open, scrape the seeds into a bowl, wash, drain, and dry.

Cucumbers As with summer squash, you will need to let the fruit ripen longer than you would for eating. As cucumbers ripen and the seeds mature, the cucumbers change color and become soft - This is the time to pick for saving seeds. However, if you stop picking



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your cucumbers to allow seeds to ripen, the vines will stop producing new fruit, so pick your fruit for seed saving toward the end of the season.

Cut the ripe cucumber in half and scrape the seeds into a bowl. To remove the seeds' coating, rub them gently around the inside of a sieve while washing them or soak them in water for two days. Rinse and dry. Make sure the cucumbers you use for seed are disease-free since some diseases can be carried on seed and could affect your future crop.

Tomatoes Saving tomato seeds take a little more time. Harvest ripe tomatoes from several different vines of the same variety. Cut each tomato across the middle and gently squeeze the juice and seeds into a bowl. You'll see that each tomato seed is encased in a gelatinous coating (This prevents the seed from sprouting inside the tomato). Remove this coating by fermenting, which mimics the natural rotting of the fruit and kills any seed-borne tomato diseases that might affect next year's crop.

To ferment the seeds, add about half as much water as there are tomato seeds and juice in the bowl and stir the mixture twice a day for about three days. Keep a close eye on the mixture, especially when the room temperature is warm, as fermentation happens more quickly at high temperatures. As the mixture ferments, its surface will become covered with white or gray mold. This concoction will not smell pleasant! Don't keep it in the kitchen, anywhere it can be tipped over by animals or children, or anywhere you do not want to smell it on a routine basis!

When bubbles begin to rise to the top of the mass, or when a thick coat of mold has formed, stop the fermentation by adding enough water to double the mixture, and stir vigorously. The clean, good seeds will settle to the bottom of the bowl. Gently pour off mold, debris and any seeds that float (they're hollow). Add more water and repeat the process until only clean seeds remain.

Capture the seeds to be saved by pouring the liquid through a strainer, wipe the strainer bottom with a towel to remove as much moisture as possible and then dump the seeds onto a glass or ceramic plate to dry. Stir several times a day to ensure even drying and to prevent the seeds from clumping together. Tomato seeds will germinate unless dried quickly. To speed drying, you may use a fan, but *do not* put the seeds in sunlight or an oven.

For information on upcoming workshops and other events at Howard County Farmers' and Nashville Demonstration Organic Garden, as well as handouts from the workshops, visit the Farmers' Market page at Nashvillear.com.

