

Harvesting the Seeds

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If you like the idea of saving seeds from your garden to grow the following season, you will need brown paper bags, plastic sealed baggies, a marker, maybe tweezers, little snips or pruners and always best to have gloves handy, maybe latex gloves too. Harvesting seeds could occur all year long depending on the plants of course. Poppies and larkspur seeds ripen early, where sunflowers, zinnias and butterfly weed ripen throughout the summer. You may want to consider saving vegetable seeds later in the fall just before you remove your summer garden. Here are a few tips on how to harvest the seeds from your garden.

I begin the process by cutting the pods attached to stems and placing them upside down in a brown paper baggie. Pull the empty pods and stems from the bag and you're left with a baggie full of clean seeds. This works best for poppies and larkspur. Other times, you may have to drop the stems and pods into a sieve to allow fine seeds to drop while leaving excess debris in the sieve to discard. If you were to disperse the seeds immediately after collecting, store them in a brown paper bag to allow the seeds to dry. If the seeds will be scattered the following year, place dried seeds in a sealed plastic baggie and store them in the bottom drawer of the refrigerator.



Have you ever thought about saving seeds on your favorite tomato or pepper or other types of vegetables? With home gardening on the rise, many varieties are readily available through the purchase of plants or seeds. However, think of how easy it could be to save your own seeds. Simply save a tomato, pepper, squash or pumpkin specifically for the seeds. Extract the seeds and place them on a napkin for a few days to let the excess juices and flesh ferment the seeds. This fermentation helps with the seed germination process later on. Once the seeds have dried, the seed and dry napkin can be folded up, placed in a sealed plastic baggie and stored in the bottom drawers of the refrigerator. Don't forget to write the variety of your vegetables on the bag along with the year. Do this with all the seeds you save. Seeds, if stored properly, can remain viable for years.

Seeds that are essential like the tropical milkweeds, *Asclepias curassavica* and *Gomphocarpus physocarpus*, should be saved for the pollinators. These pose a challenge since the seeds are attached to silky hairs but harvest them because seeds that disperse to the ground, may or may not survive to come up on their own the following year. It's best to scout the pods everyday because as soon as they begin to turn brown, the pods dehisce where the hairs will float the seeds away. This is where you may want to wear latex gloves as the milkweed produces a white milky substance which some may find sticky or irritating. One can pluck the pods from the stem just as they turn brown to place in a paper bag. Seed pods will dehisce in the bag which then the seeds can be extracted from the hairs to place in a plastic sealed baggie. It's best to store the seeds for winter, sow them in pots in the early spring and transplant to the garden once frost has passed.



Gomphocarpus physocarpus (top) and *Asclepias curassavica* (bottom)

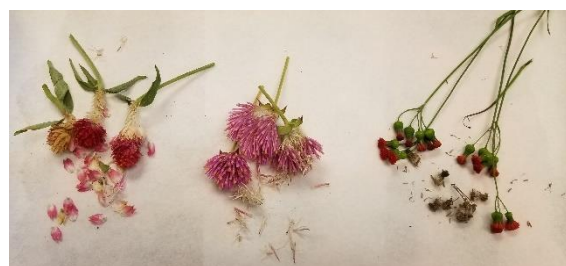
Some years, you fall in love with certain annual plants but the feeling of not knowing if you'll find it again could arise. Outstanding performers for us are *Gomphrena* or globe amaranth, and the *Emilia coccinea* or tassel flower. Collect the seeds at the end of the season, place in a brown paper bag to dry, then transfer the dried seeds to a plastic baggie to store until next spring. Some annual seeds are best directly scattered on the ground and lightly covered with mulch. Those poppy and larkspur seeds you saved in spring, should be scattered in fall for early spring germination. While the globe amaranth and tassel flowers can be scattered in spring after the fear of frost has passed.



Sunflowers



Lilies



Red & Pink Globe Amaranth, Tassel Flower

We love sharing seeds of annuals, hardy perennials and flowers too. There is a National Seed Swap day usually held in January in which we take part. We also sell our seeds in our Gift Shop or hand out free seeds for special occasions. Check with your local garden center, county extension or public garden for information on how you can participate in a Seed Swap near you.

