Blooming Boulevards
Connecting Neighbourhoods to Nature

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Seed Saving 101

Tips to get you started in saving and sharing quality seed:

1 **Know your seed.** Whether you're growing flowering plants or edibles, it's best to use heirloom varieties. If you save seeds from a hybrid variety (often labeled as "F1" in catalogs or seed packets), they won't grow "true to type" to the original parent, and the next generation of plants will be highly unpredictable in overall type, quality, and flavor.

2 **Include native flowering plants.** Propagate and grow locally native flowers for your garden to attract pollinators, increase yield and help the environment.

3 **Save information, not just seed.** Keep good records from the start. The information you pass on is as important as the seed. Make note of common and Latin names; dates of planting, plant maturity, and seed harvest; whether off-types were culled; population size and isolation distance; and any other important observations about the variety.

4 **Watch for cross-pollination.** Different varieties of crops of the same species can cross-pollinate, producing offspring with different characteristics than the original variety. To keep a variety "pure," you should plant in isolation to minimize the chance of crossing. Crops that are wind or insect pollinated (often called "outcrossers") require a greater isolation distance from other varieties of the same species than those that have flowers that self-pollinate (often called "selfers").

5 **Consider plant populations — numbers count.** To maintain the genetic integrity of a variety, it's important to save seed from a diverse population of individual plants. The optimum population size differs depending on whether a variety is wind or insect pollinated, or self-pollinated.

6 **Choose ideal plants for ideal seed.** Healthy, vigorous plants are more likely to produce healthy, vigorous seed. Save seeds from disease-free plants to help prevent seed-borne disease. Also, collect seeds from plants that show ideal characteristics (shape, color, dates to maturity) that match the variety's description.

7 **Make it last.** Good storage practices will increase the long-term viability of your seed. The key to successful long-term seed storage is keeping your cache cool and dry. If you store your seeds where the air is moist, they may sprout and/or become mildewed (Tip: You may want to put a small amount of powdered milk into each storage container to act as a desiccant). Mold growth occurs at a faster rate in warm air than it does in cool air. Store native seeds in a refrigerator. Potato and onion sets may be stored in open boxes or hung in mesh bags in a place where the temperature is 35 to 40 degrees Fahrenheit, and the air is not overly dry.

TYPE OF SEED	USEFUL LIFE (YEARS)
Asparagus	4
Beans, string	2
Broccoli	3
Cabbage	3
Carrots	4
Cucumber	5
Lettuce	5
Onion	2
Pea	2
Pumpkin	6
Radish	3
Spinach	5
Squash	4
Tomato	3
Turnip	3

Seed longevity fluctuates. Some of the above seeds may — depending on the particular variety and the storage conditions — remain usable for up to 10 years.

Viability: To test how many will sprout, first, place moistened paper towel or cotton on a plastic, glass or ceramic plate.

1. Place 10 or multiple of 10 seeds on top of the damp towel.
2. Cover the plate.
3. Leave the plate it at room temperature for 5 to 10 days.
4. Count the number of seeds that have begun to grow (if 9 out of 10 seeds have sprouted, the germination rate is 90 percent = a good rate).

Label your containers with the date of the test, seed collection date and the variety of seed being tested.
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Recommended Resources:

Seed Savers Exchange	https://www.seedsavers.org
Seeds of Diversity	https://seeds.ca/sw8/web
Slow Food International	https://www.slowfood.com
North American Native Plant Society	http://nanps.org
Xerces Society – Collecting and Using Your Own Wildflower Seed	https://xerces.org/publications/guidelines/collecting-and-using-your-own-wildflower-seed

If you have never grown your own food or flowers from seed…
now is a good time to start.