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How Do I Save And Store Vegetable Seeds?

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A weekly question/answer column

How Do I Save And Store Vegetable Seeds?

Bill Varga answers:*

The art of saving seeds was practiced by gardeners long before there were commercial seed producers. Many vegetables owe their existence to early gardeners who had an eye for quality and saved the seeds of their best plants.

- To collect or store seeds from your garden, select varieties that are well adapted to your area. Quality seeds are a small investment for the return received.
- Purchasing more seeds than you can use in one year is economical since unused seeds can be stored and saved for another year. Keep leftover seeds dry and in their original package. Fold or close packages as tightly as possible and place them in a jar with an airtight lid. Store the jar in a cool, dry place.
- To ensure low-moisture conditions, place two tablespoons of fresh powdered milk in a double layer of facial tissue and put it in the bottom of a storage jar. Replace it each year.
- Here are guidelines on how long seeds can be stored. The years are approximations and will vary with environmental conditions.
- 1 year: parsnip
- 2 years: leek, okra, onion, parsley, and sweet corn
- 3 years: asparagus, bean, carrot and pea
- 4 years: beet, broccoli, brussels sprout, cabbage, cauliflower, mustard, pepper and tomato
- 5 years: celery, cucumber, eggplant, kohlrabi, lettuce, muskmelon, pumpkin, radish, spinach, squash, turnip and watermelon

* Bill Varga is Utah State University Extension Horticulturist