



# Seed Saving Workshop



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# Introduction to Seed Saving

*The history of saving seed is ancient! Humans have saved seed for centuries, even millennia! (At least 10,000 years.) We have taken for granted the long fascinating story behind our food and how it got to our plate.*



Take a walk through the average veg garden, for example, and there you will find: Cabbages -native to the coast of England and France; Maize -indigenous to Central America; Tomato's - Peru, South America. How did it get to be grown in your country and when and how did it arrive?

Someone saved the seed and travelled 10's of thousands of kilometres and/or passed it down through the centuries and

now it has found you! What a story!

Not only has it travelled far, but food has gone through many adaptations and changes. For example maize is a member of the grass family and originally the cob was the size of a thumb nail! But through human intervention and selective breeding we have today a much larger cob.

Seed has since time immemorial been interwoven into the very fabric of our cultures. Every important event was traditionally marked with a seed ritual, or the planting of seed. It is and has been the most powerful symbol for all life.

Seed sovereignty means that we the individuals and our communities have control of our seed. Not big multi nationals.

A definition of food security is a household having enough nutritious food to eat that is easily obtainable locally and supply is resilient, in the case of a crisis such as peak oil.

The past century has seen the most dramatic changes to our food than all the others put together.

## Why do we need to save seed? Who should save seed?



All those interested in the future of our planet should practice growing their own food and ultimately saving their own seeds. We should all grow as much food as we can to fulfil our household needs and save the seed from our crops. Share and swap that seed with friends, family and community. You may be able to afford to buy your food but the earth has subsidised your meal! Think how far it may have travelled to get to you. An average carrot can travel 1,500km before it makes it way to your plate!

The food we as humans consume used to come from 1,500 different plants and each plant had thousands of cultivated varieties. Now the world's nutrition comes from 30 different plants and of that, 4 (rice, wheat, soya and corn) provide 75% of our calorie intake.

Nature thrives on diversity. It is the backbone of her our seed such an important obligation. We will diversity. Your children will eat food with more flavour less need of fertiliser pest control because it has a and you!



# Different Types of Seed

## *-Heirloom/Heritage seeds and open pollinated (OP)*

Heirloom or heritage seed are open pollinated. Open pollinated means that if you are to save your seed from your vegetables and sow it again it will breed true or have almost identical characteristics to its parent. Now heirloom is OP, but also it is a variety that has been stable for at least 50 years in a particular location and has some distinguishing features, good flavour etc.

Heirlooms or land race seed are the seed the previous generations harvested, stored and saved. It is seed that is most important to us as homesteaders.

Due to large corporations we have lost 93% of our seed variety of in 80 years!

**All heirlooms are open pollinated but not all open pollinated are heirloom!**

## *-Hybrid seed*

Hybrids are vegetables/plants whose parents (usually in-bred's) have been forced to cross, producing an offspring variety with more vigour, disease resistance; fruit size etc.

The seed saved of Hybrid plants do not breed true-to-type, unlike open pollinated seed, and they may even be sterile. For these reasons hybrid seed should be avoided when food security and seed saving is the goal. The reasons behind or value of the hybrid are not necessarily for nutrition or flavour. Those are usually sacrificed for a more commercial value such as uniformity in size; ease in harvesting; disease resistance or shelf life. They are also very expensive.

They are marked on a packet with an 'F' such as F1 or F2 and so on.

## *-Organic seed*

Organic seeds are harvested from plant material that has been grown according to strict organic conditions and has been certified by an external organic certifying body. It is grown using only organically certified fertilisers and pesticides. The seeds themselves also have no outer chemical treatment for preservation.

## **-GMO seed**

GMO stands for genetically modified organisms. It can refer to any plant or animal micro-organism that has been modified using genetic engineering such as gene cloning or protein engineering.

Mankind has been selectively breeding food crops from as far back as we know of, but what makes GMO different and highly controversial is that genes are transferred from 2 unrelated species: animal genes to plant for example.

The idea is to create a modified species (usually patented) that has an extraordinary quality to it such as Bt-corn which has BT (*Bacillus thuringiensis*) engineered into its make-up, creating a super pest resistant strain of corn. GMO seeds are patented and have to be purchased, like hybrid seeds, year after year from a big corporation.

There is a growing concern worldwide that not enough testing has been done on GMO food. There is now evidence that proves it lowers immunity and can have a very negative impact on our health. GMO grown crops also demand stronger pesticides to be used in future crops as the pests increase in immunity. Perhaps the most alarming fact is that it threatens our traditional crops. For example once a GMO corn cross-pollinates with a non-GMO corn then it is contaminated for ever! Some countries have taken a very strong stand against GMO for this reason.

GMO and hybrid seed are patented so the big companies own the rights to them. This means because of mainstream agriculture those patented seeds are favoured and farmers no longer save their seed. The big corporations want to own the rights to our food! And to a large extent this has happened!

**“Corporate-owned seed accounts for 82% of the world wide seed market”!**

# Harvesting Seed

## Cleaning seed

Seed cleaning is either processed using the dry method or the wet method.

### *Dry processing:*

This method is used for seed that is produced in pods or husks.

Wherever possible, we should leave a carrot or legume (bean/pea) seed to dry in the garden on the plant.

A variety of dry processing techniques can be employed to remove the seed from the chaff or husk:

*Threshing* is used to break the seed from the exterior covering. The dry seed heads can be beaten, rubbed or flailed until the seeds are freed. Seed savers can place seed in a large bag and trample them to break open the casings.

*Winnowing* is the process of separating chaff and debris from the seed. The seed in most cases is denser or heavier and with a consistent light breeze or fan the chaff can be separated by blowing it off.

- Be sure to use a large ground sheet in case of a miss calculation!
- A bowl can be used for small quantities, blowing and circling the air out.
- Several sieves of different grades can also be employed.