

How to harvest and store seeds for the Seed Library

Whether you already have seeds that you would like to share, or are wondering how to go about harvesting them this autumn from the plants in your garden or containers, here are a few tips to get you started.

- You need to collect seed when it's ripe. This is generally when seed pods or capsules have become brown and dry, and before pods split.
- Bear in mind that the seed from cultivated varieties may not always produce plants that look identical to the parent, but can throw up some interesting surprises!
- Collect seed on a still dry day, and only harvest it from healthy plants.
- Place a clean paper bag over the top of ripe seed heads, cut the stalk with secateurs, invert the bag and then shake the heads well to empty out the seed. Whole pods can be snipped straight into a bag and the seeds removed later. Remember to write the plant name on the bag!
- When you have finished a collecting session, gently tip the contents of each bag out on to a clean sheet of paper, and remove any debris (chaff) from the seeds. For small seeds this is best done using a fine sieve (the chaff will pass through and the seed will remain in the sieve).
- Funnel the seeds from each plant into a paper envelope that has been labelled with the plant name and the collection date. Leave them in a warm dry place for 7–10 days until the seeds are dry.
- Then transfer the envelopes to an airtight plastic box containing a sachet of silica gel to absorb any moisture. Always avoid using plastic bags to store seed.
- One of the best places to store your seed collection is at the bottom of the fridge, but any consistently cool dry location is suitable.

Some types of seed are best not stored, or else require special treatment before they will germinate. However, any of the seeds listed below can be simply harvested now and stored until the spring.

Annuals: antirrhinum, calendula (pot marigold), Californian poppy (*Eschscholzia californica*), cornflower, cosmos, honesty, larkspur, love-in-a mist (*Nigella*), nasturtium, opium poppy (*Papaver somniferum*), sunflower, sweet pea, zinnia

Perennials: aquilegia, campanula, echinacea, geum, hardy geranium, helenium, Japanese anemone, Mexican fleabane (*Erigeron*), rudbeckia, salvia, scabious, sea holly (*Eryngium*), verbascum, *Verbena bonariensis*, viola

Biennials: foxglove

Herbs: basil, borage, coriander, dill, parsley

Vegetables: amaranth, broad beans, chard, peas, runner beans