



Note to Self: Don't Over-think Seed Planting

By Barbara Elmore, HCMG

As the seed-planting season approaches, I am watching the birds because their efforts result in more success than mine do. Maybe the best planting technique is just to toss it out there willy-nilly?

As if to confirm this theory, I received a prized gift from an old schoolmate: heirloom poppy seeds from his grandmother's garden. His brother is a gardener and lives in their grandmother's old home. He collected the seeds and sent them to me, with simple instructions. "Just throw them on the ground the end of September. Don't even rake them in."

That I can do, and I have a spot in mind.

And those words remind me of a friend's lesson on planting coneflower seeds. "Just do this," she said, rubbing her palms together over an imaginary plot of dirt. The coneflowers grew tall and pink and lasted throughout the summer.

The basil has gone to seed, and the finch will plant the seeds if you don't.



So I am ready to sow, but what about the leftover seeds? Here are simple instructions on collecting, care and storage:

- Collect seeds from the best-looking plants in your garden, those with good growth, color and no obvious disease.
- Hybrid seeds present difficulties. Produce from the local grocery store likely has hybrid seeds. Some of the seed you purchase in little packets is hybrid. You may not get good results trying to collect and plant these.
- Climate matters. Store seeds in a dry place that is neither too hot nor too cold.
- Improvise on storage containers. Paper bags allow for air circulation, but some people report good results with sealable plastic bags.
- Label everything. Some seeds need to be planted immediately, and others keep for years. If you label and experiment, you will know which is which.
- Test seeds before planting. Place your seeds inside a damp paper towel, put in a plastic bag with small holes punched in it, and store in a dark place. Check in a week. If no seeds have sprouted, wait another week. If after two weeks none or only a few seeds have sprouted, you might want to toss the seeds—or use a lot more of them when you plant.

Seed experts have published a number of books on saving specific kinds of seeds. Look for these.

Basic Seed Saving by Bill McDorman

Saving Seeds: The Gardener's Guide to Growing & Storing Vegetable & Flower Seeds by Marc Rogers

Seed to Seed by Suzanne Ashworth

Seed Sowing and Saving: Step-by-Step Techniques for Collecting and Growing More Than 100 Vegetables, Flowers, and Herbs by Carole B. Turner.

If you want to try your hand with seeds or just want to look at some colorful catalogs, here are online sources. You can order a catalog or order seeds — which means a catalog will follow.

- Renee's Garden: www.reneesgarden.com or 888-880-7228
- Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds: www.rareseeds.com or 417-924-8917
- Seeds of Change: www.seedsofchange.com or 888-762-7333
- Seeds Savers Exchange: www.seedsavers.org or 563-382-5990