

Tips for Collecting, Cleaning and Storing Seeds

Firstly, please remember that plants grown from open-pollinated seed probably have two parents – so may not resemble the plant the seed came from! Highly bred cultivars have complicated genetic backgrounds and their offspring may be very different. Part of the fun is not knowing exactly what to expect.

Collecting seed: Leave on the plant to ripen. Choose a dry day, preferably the third or fourth in a row. Make sure the seeds to be collected are fully ripe. Carefully shake the seed into a paper bag or cut off the seed heads and place in the bag. (Tie a paper bag over the seed heads of plants which shed seed before it is fully ripe, or have explosive seed distribution mechanisms, e.g. geraniums.)

Some pods may be reluctant to release the seed, especially plants in the pink family – *dianthus*, *lychnis*, *silene* etc., in which case crush the pods gently between your fingers.

Cleaning seed: Separate seeds from pods and chaff as far as possible. Leaving it for a few days in a warmish place in a closed envelope or paper bag usually releases most seeds. Sieving helps a great deal, and for light chaff ‘winnowing’ by blowing gently across the seed, spread out on a sheet of paper, can be surprisingly successful.

There is no need to remove ‘tails’ from e.g. Clematis, grasses etc, or other integral parts of seeds, but do try to get rid of the stalks, leaves, detached fluff and bits of seed cases which could rot or go mouldy in storage.

Packing seeds: Please put each variety of seed into a small, escape-proof paper envelope or packet. Wage envelopes or dinner money envelopes are good for this purpose. Re-used envelopes are fine too but make sure all escape routes are sealed up! Members will only expect a small amount of seed so if you have a lot, please divide it up into several smaller packets.

Naming seeds: If you know the full, correct Latin or common name for the plant, put it on the packet. If you aren’t sure, only know the genus name (the first part of the Latin name, e.g. ‘Nigella’), or don’t know the name at all, put what you do know plus a few words of description. Flower colour/shape, plant height, leaf shape and anything distinctive about it are the most helpful.

If the seed is from a named cultivar please use the prefix ‘ex’ before the name to indicate that it may not come true.

Storing seeds: You should store seed packets somewhere cool and dry and the best place is in an airtight container in the fridge. I use a ‘Klip & Lock’ box with a few small sachets of silica gel. Kept cool like this, seed can often remain viable for many years. However, if the fridge is full, a shoe box in the spare bedroom will do. Beware of keeping it in the shed. I once lost my entire stock of Sweet Pea seeds to mice!

Have fun!

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