

HARVESTING

Useful tips for collecting seed for the MidCoast Seed Library.

Let's say you are growing your own vegetables, fruit or herbs at home, and you want to contribute to the Seed Library. Fantastic! There are a few things to consider to help the Newcastle Seed Library, and your garden, grow.

The first thing to ask is “Where did the plant come from?”

You'll need to harvest seed from plants that are open pollinated varieties information sheet. That means you'll either need to have grown the plant from heirloom or other open pollinated seed, or planted a seedling of such a variety. Even if you are growing tomatoes in the garden, if it is a hybrid variety, the seed from your plant may not grow into anything like the variety in your garden for the next borrower. When sourcing plants for your garden, look for varieties marked as OP, heritage or heirloom and not labelled hybrid of f1.

It can also be helpful to learn about the difference between species and varieties, to understand how cross pollination hybrids occur and better understand what is growing in your garden.

The next thing to consider is “How do I harvest the seed?”

To do this, you'll need to be able to recognise when the seeds of a plant have matured. This differs by species. For example, cucumber is often eaten whilst the seeds are immature, so just taking the seeds out of a cucumber you picked to eat won't necessarily work. Lettuce, on the other hand, will show you when it's seeds are dry and hard. Knowing when to harvest seed will involve reading up on what you are growing and leaving some fruits to fully mature in the garden.

The easiest way to understand whether seed is ready or not, is to think about if it was growing naturally in the forest. When and how would the seeds spread?

Once you know the seeds are ready to harvest, it can be as simple as collecting seed pods or picking fruit and taking out the seeds. For some plants, this means shaking dry seeds into a paper bag, for others seeds have to be extracted from pulp and dried. Importantly, think of the Seed Library as a community. With so many plants in our 'gardens, the Seed Library is strengthened by the knowledge within our community, with borrowers learning and sharing what they are growing and how to harvest seed for that species.

Finally, you need to think “How will I store and share the seed?”

Seeds like to be stored in a cool, dry, dark place. Many seeds can often be kept in a cupboard with these conditions for a couple of years, while others don't last as long that's fine because you'll want to share them through the Seed Library anyway! Once dried, seeds can also be frozen in airtight containers. The important thing to remember is to label your seed! You'll need the species or type of crop, the variety, where it was grown and when it was harvested. You could also add any other notes you would like the borrower to know about.

MidCoastSeed Library Tips

- Not all plants seed in a single season, so check if the plant is an annual, biennial or perennial.
- Some plants won't set seed until after certain climate conditions, like a cold period.
- You may have plants that need others around for pollination to occur, if there is not a viable variety nearby then your plant may not flower, fruit and set seed.
- Integrated planting has many wonderful benefits for your garden, but serious seed saving means keeping varieties true to type and not cross pollinating to form accidental hybrids, so plan space between your varieties in some parts of your garden where you will be more certain that you can harvest true to variety seed.
- Go slow, small and simple. Start with one variety in your garden to learn about and harvest.