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Saving seeds means a better garden

Gardeners become fascinated with growing heirloom vegetable varieties for a number of reasons. They like the connection with gardeners of the past or they like being a part of the effort to maintain a diverse gene pool or they simply prefer the good taste of a variety that grows beautifully in their garden.

No matter the reason, as soon as the fascination takes hold, gardeners quickly move from growing heirlooms to saving heirloom seed. The two activities are closely bound. If you are interested in saving your own seed (and saving a little money, too, since seeds often cost \$1 a packet) you must only save seed from open pollinated vegetables. Seed from hybrids will give you a very odd vegetable and not the same variety that it came from.

This means that the first step in saving seed is to buy an open pollinated variety. Read the catalog descriptions carefully before you order. A plant produces seed by getting pollen from the male parts of its flower, the stamens, to the female parts, the pistils. A flower that contains both male and female parts is called a complete flower; sometimes they are designed so that they are pollinated before the flower even opens. An incomplete flower has only male or female parts and needs to be cross pollinated.

Some seed is easy to grow and save; some is trickier, but no varieties are really difficult. After all, gardeners saved their own seed for thousands of years before the hybridizers and seed companies took over.

Beans and peas are self pollinating. Even allowing a distance as small as 25 feet between varieties will insure that they won't cross pol-

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Between
The Rows

linate, creating an odd hybrid, by accident. As a rule of thumb, you can count on bean seeds being ripe six weeks after you would pick them for eating, peas four weeks later. Peas and beans can be dried in the pod, but it's a good idea to put the pods in paper or burlap bags that will allow air circulation, but catch the seeds if the pods pop open.

When the pods are fully dry, crush them to release the seeds. You can do this by hand, or if you have a large number of seeds to handle you can put the pods in a sack and beat them with a flail. Remember, the seed is a living thing and you want to free it from its pod without damaging it. Then, separate the seeds from dust and plant debris by winnowing. On a day when there is a breeze, or with the help of an electric fan, toss the seeds into the air. The lighter dust and debris will blow away. After drying and cleaning your seed, lay it on blotting paper or screens in a well ventilated room for a couple of days so it can dry some more. The moisture content of the seeds must be kept as low as possible while seeds are stored to maintain their vigor. Put them in a lidded jar and put it where it will be cool and dark until you need them in the spring.

Tomatoes are also self pollinating. Choose a good tomato from each of two or three plants. When the tomato is perfectly ripe, scoop out the seeds and jellylike material that holds



Recorder/Lucia Russom

them. Put all this matter into a jar with a little water, stir daily for about four days. This mixture will ferment, killing the tomato canker virus, and the bad seeds will float to the top. After four days, skim off the floating pulp and discard. The good seed will have settled. Rinse and dry the seed and store.

It's easy to understand the temptation to use leftover vegetables to provide seeds, but remember, the quality of your whole crop next year depends to a great extent on the quality of your seed. Collect your seed from a healthy plant with all the best qualities of that variety, whether it's the size of the fruit, date of maturity, tolerance for cold or

drought or whatever makes it special and desirable.

Saving seed isn't difficult, but I don't have room in this column to discuss all the places trouble might arise.

Rob Johnston, Jr. of Johnny's Selected Seeds (Foss Hill Road, Albion, ME 04910) has put together a little booklet, *Growing Garden Seeds*, that he sells for \$2.50 plus \$1 for handling and postage. *The Heirloom Gardener*, by Caroline Jabs (Sierra Club books, \$12.95 paper) gives you over 300 pages of information about heirloom varieties of vegetables and fruits, very specific directions on saving seed and how to avoid problems with disease and pests.

Proper care keeps bloom on cut flowers

The Associated Press

STATE COLLEGE, Pa. — It's happened to all of us. You buy beautiful cut flowers at the store, take them home and watch them droop away in a day or two.

That doesn't have to be the case, according to Dennis Wolnick, associate professor of horticulture at Penn State University and coach of the student flower judging team that won a national competition this year.

All it takes is a little knowledge to buy the right flowers and keep them blooming.

First, check the way the flowers are displayed.

Flowers that are packed tightly together in warm temperatures will allow humidity to build around them, creating a prime environment for the common fungal disease botrytis, Wolnick says. Early warning signs are brown spots on the petals and leaves that are touching each other. In later stages there is a gray mold.

Fresh flowers will have clear color and firm green leaves.

Second, the water should be clear, not cloudy or stale. Make sure the parts of the flower stems that are under water are stripped of most foliage. Leaves in the water will decay and attract bacteria.

Third, don't make the mistake of thinking that a bouquet of unopened buds will last longer.

Wolnick says roses that are sold with buds tightly furled and the green sepals still wrapped around the flower were probably cut too early and may simply droop over without opening. He says it's best to buy roses that are about one-quarter to one-third open.

For flowers such as gladiolus or snapdragon with several blooms on a stem, pick those that have one or two florets opened and the rest of the buds still to come out.

After you've made your selection, the care you give your flowers will determine just how long they'll last once you get them home, Wolnick says.

Most people know that they should snip about an inch from the bottom of the stems, he says. However, most don't know that they should do this while holding the stems in a bowl of water.

"If you cut the stems in the air, the internal pressure will suck more air in, creating air bubbles in the vessels that will prevent the stems from taking more water," Wolnick says.

There's no evidence that putting aspirin, copper pennies or any of the other homemade remedies into the water does any good, Wolnick says.

He recommends using the commercial flower preservatives available at stores. They provide sugar as food to nourish the buds, an acidifier to help them keep their color and a bacteria retardant to keep the water clean.

"Keep flowers away from drafts, direct sunlight and warm temperatures," he says. "These cause rapid water loss from the leaves and petals. You can also prolong their lives by putting them somewhere cool at night — on the floor, in the garage or even in the refrigerator — provided you're careful not to let them freeze."

Treated properly, chrysanthemums will last two to three weeks, carnations 10 to 14 days, roses seven days and bulb-type flowers such as daffodils four to six days, Wolnick says.

Most flowers available commercially have been bred for longevity and are usually in stores within three days of being harvested. Even flowers imported from Holland can be bought within 72 hours of being cut, he adds.

Paint is only as good as the wood under it