

Collecting and Sterilizing Vegetable Seeds

Collecting, sterilizing and growing vegetables from seeds is relatively common for expert gardeners, whereas, inexperienced gardeners swap seeds, and novices buy plants, and if the plant already has fruit, and is almost ripened, they feel it's even better – that's the difference between experts and amateurs. In this abbreviated introductory segment I will show you how to collect, sterilize and store seeds for your next challenge – seed starting.



If your lettuce or any other vegetable plant starts to bolt or flower during the growing season, it's not a tragedy; take advantage of the situation and leave it to seed. The extra bonus will re-seed your next year's crop, and the surplus seeds can make new gardening friends.

As with lettuce, stake plants to prevent from toppling, and when the top of the flower turns cottony white, but before it fully opens up like a dandelion ball, hand pick one by one while they mature.

If a milky substance oozes out from the stem when picking, and it's sticky to your fingers, it means the seed is not mature enough – leave on the plant for another day or so.



Separate petals from seeds by rubbing them with your fingers, spread on a piece of cardboard or flat surface and let them dry for a couple of days.

Once they're dry, gently blow off the little dried petals and either sterilize the seeds (as I will demonstrate later), or place in an airtight plastic bag or container and store in a dry/cool place.



Radish pods are very attractive among other vegetables, and are quite easy to harvest.



Either pick pods individually as they brown on the plant or let all the pods dry out before cutting the stem off or pulling it out of the ground.

It's faster to harvest the whole plant however, if picked individually you can choose the best seeds.

Hang the bunch of pods in your shed or a dry place and extract the seeds once they're dried.



After a couple of days when the seeds are dry, you should sterilize them and place them in an airtight plastic bag – the process will be explained later in the presentation.



Whenever you discover something out of the ordinary, in this case, an unusual tomato that you would like to grow in the future, tag it so no one will pick it off the vine.



Wait until it is fully ripened, or better yet, when it begins to decay before extracting the seeds.



After it's been quartered, take a knife and remove seeds from its cavities.



Using a strainer, press your finger against the seeds to dislodge the pulp.



Spray with a decent stream of water from your kitchen sprayer or an outside hose until the seeds are free from pulp.



Place them on a piece of wood or cardboard to let dry, and once in a while scrape with a knife or something so it won't stick to the surface.



Once the individual seeds are dry, place in gauze or netting bundles (shown in photo), secure with tie, and label each one.



Next step: one method of sterilizing seeds is to use 1 tablespoon of apple cider vinegar to 1 quart of drinkable water. In a bowl, immerse for 10-15 minutes.



Rinse thoroughly for 5 minutes and hang somewhere to dry.



Another method you can use but is not organic is a 10% bleach solution: 1part bleach to 9 parts of drinkable water, immerse seeds 5-10 minutes, rinse thoroughly after sterilization and let dry for a couple of days before storing.

NOTE: I do not recommend the following method, but some people sterilize certain seeds by immersing them in hot water of 118°F to 122°F for 22 to 30 minutes. I would not subject my seeds to such treatments. It's too risky to control water temperatures even in large pots and the possibility of destroying them or reducing their ability to germinate is not a good choice.



Take seeds out of the larger bundles and place on small paper plates to let dry (as in photo).

Since the weather wasn't cooperating, these seeds were being dried on top of my basement furnace; I wanted to make sure they were completely dry so the mold wouldn't destroy them.

Smaller bundles should be hung in a protected area to dry completely.



I enclose seeds in an airtight plastic bag, put them inside a plastic or metal container, such as toolbox and store it in a cool/dry place in my basement.

Seeds are meant to be sown in the garden, not consumed by rodents during the winter months.