

Seeds in our community: swapping & saving

@seedsofstives was born in 2021 with the aim of helping folk gain easy access to seeds within our community and also to encourage a return to seed saving, as well as growing more of our own food again.

1) COMMUNITY SEED BOXES

There are now four community seed boxes in our community, these can be found at:

- a) St. Ives Farmers Market. Thursdays 9:30am – 2:30pm at the Guildhall
- b) Yallah café on the harbourfront
- c) St. Eia Café at the Porthmeor Beach end of The Digey
- d) St. Ives Foodshare

Everyone is welcome to swap seeds they no longer need or have saved or alternatively leave a donation instead.

All donations are used to purchase seeds for these community boxes.

2) SEED SAVING

I've been slowly teaching myself how to save seeds these last couple of years.

The PDF available as a free download on the www.realseeds.co.uk website was a wonderful startpoint. Sue Strickland's book – Back Garden Seed Saving is invaluable if you want to go into more detail.

Time, patience, observation and experimentation have been the biggest teachers. I have given a few talks on "Getting started with Seed Saving", find attached a short document summarizing that talk.

3) CONNECTING GROWERS

I dream of a community of growers here in St. Ives and Carbis Bay; local, chemical free food, available for all, affordably. The benefits to people, place and planet are clear to me. Hopefully this dream will become a reality in the coming years.

A starting point of this has been to connect local growers. We have hosted two seed socials this year, with a focus on swapping seeds and plants. They were both lovely events and the new connections formed felt positive and useful. We will post on the website when we host our third event, most likely early 2023 as we all head into the main sowing and growing season.

Seed Saving Talk – given at St Ives Community Orchard Apple Day in 2021

I will cover a little history, benefits of seed saving and how to get started based upon my own experiences and experiments!

A bit of history about seed saving

- until the late 19th century seed saving would have been totally normal for any and every grower. Then in 1866 on Long Island the first commercially produced seed, cabbage seed, was produced. There was then a huge

growth in commercially grown and sold seeds. Folk found it easier, more convenient and quicker. Another one of those convenient options that we didn't think through the implications of I guess!

Of course, there have been some downsides.....

- a) loss of diversity
- b) A few large companies now control seed production and therefore also food production
- c) loss of seeds that are adapted to their local environment
- d) costs to buy seeds
- e) F1 seeds.....these are bred for yield, disease and pest resistance but actually you can't save seeds from them.

So now we are in an era where folk have realized and accepted the downsides and are wanting to do something about it. There are many initiatives around the world focusing on seed saving now.

Benefits of seed saving

We will create:

- a) seeds that are adapted to the local environment. They will be more resilient to our local weather conditions and soil conditions too.
- b) free seed!
- c) connections between local growers, building our community of local growers and seed savers (this one gets me excited everytime!!)
- d) There will be less pressure on energy resources....as we won't be buying seeds that have been produced and shipped in from around the UK or even further afield.
- e) No F1 seeds produced so we know we can always save from these seeds.
- f) Create and keep diversity within our community
- g) Build increased resilience locally within our food system

THINGS TO CONSIDER BEFORE YOU START SAVING SEEDS:

- a) You can't save seeds from F1 seeds. Always check the packet. Why? They won't breed true to type. The offspring will be a weak plant, with different characteristics to the parent plant. More info here:
<https://www.rhs.org.uk/vegetables/f1-hybrids>
- b) Check whether the plant is self-pollinating or cross-pollinating
- c) Check whether the plant flowers in the first year (annuals) or in the second year (biennial).
- d) Ask yourself what you are most interested in plant wise, what do you like to eat, what do you like to have in your garden.....start there.
- e) think about how you like to learn and access those resources. Books, videos, talking to others, social media, websites?

For me I read a bit and then experiment a bit. I am gradually building knowledge and confidence that way. Observation in my garden ...watching when and what flowers and how seeds are developed in each plant as also been key. Realising this takes time so just being patient with saving a few needs seeds each year has ended up being my approach.

SOME SUGGESTIONS TO GET STARTED WITH YOUR OWN SEED SAVING:

1) EASY TO SAVE

Plants that self-pollinate are the easiest plants to start saving seeds from. It means when they pollinate and produce seed they don't cross with other varieties or other species....so you know the seeds produced will produce the same plant when sown.

Good examples of these are peas and tomatoes.

So you can grow as many different varieties of these plants next to each other and not have to think about cross pollination and creating different types of plants the following year.

Peas....just let some pods stay on the vine longer, until they are dried out by the sun. Hey presto...you have your seeds for next year.

Tomatoes ...remove the seeds from the plants and dry out on kitchen paper. It is best to wash them beforehand to remove the gel that surrounds the seeds.

Always dry the seeds out thoroughly....I do this in a sunny spot in the house, before storing and labelling them clearly. I use jars. Some people use envelopes. Ideally they would be stored in a cool, dry, dark place, which means they will keep for as long as possible.

2) ALSO PRETTY EASY

So I have found these plants easy to save from because I have only grown one variety of them. They do cross with other varieties of the same species...for example KALE....if I grow more than one variety they would cross and create a new type of kale. Not necessarily a problem, you may create something wonderful! But if your aim is to grow Cavalo Nero and produce Cavalo Nero seeds next year it is best if you grow just one type of kale and save from that.

I do grow more than one type of kale at a time.....and if I want to save seeds from them I make sure that I remove flowers from the varieties I am not saving seed from that year and leave the flowers on one variety only. That way I know they cannot cross pollinate.

Kale plants tend to overwinter here in Cornwall so they can be kept in the ground. Come March they start to grow again, producing more crops for food. In about April or so they bolt and go to flower. I leave them to produce flowers which eventually turn to seeds. This process takes quite a few months for the seeds to be fully mature. So it isn't that it is difficult but it uses space in your garden that you might otherwise have put in a new crop. The seed pods develop after the flowering and then I leave until they look fully swelled and have started to dry out on the plant. I bring inside and ensure I dry them out fully before opening each pod and collecting the individual seeds.

Rocket is also saved in this way and easy.

I have also used the same method with sage, chervil and lettuce....the seeds come directly after flowering, no pods are developed like rocket and kale.

3) HARDER TO SAVE

And something I haven't tackled yet.....are plants that flower in their second year, like beetroots and carrots. So you grow your crop of beets and carrots. You need about 20-40 of each to save seed from to ensure the genetic diversity of the variety is maintained. If you only saved from a few plants each year the genetic diversity is weakened and you may end up with weak crops. The plants here in Cornwall can be left to overwinter in the ground. Alternatively you can harvest all of your crops and then choose the best 20-40 plants that you want to save seed from. You then have to store the beetroot and carrots in sand until the Spring when you re-plant them. After a month or so they will then produce flowers....from these seeds are created. So carrots and beetroots are called biennials because they flower in their second year. They also cross pollinate with other varieties so you need to only save seed from one variety each year.

Squash and courgettes, whilst they flower in the first year and could be easy to save seed from the key thing to know is they cross pollinate very very easily. All squash and courgettes cross with each other. So if you are growing more than one type of squash and they flower at the same time and you then save seed....you have no idea what type of plant you may produce. I have heard people have produced all sorts of strange looking and not especially nice tasting squash. It would be good fun to do as an experiment though if you have the time and space in your garden.

If you are interested in seed saving and would like to connect, please message via stivesorchard@gmail.com or via Instagram on [@seedsofstives](https://www.instagram.com/seedsofstives)