

- **I had a successful harvest of peas, beans and tomatoes this year. Can I save the seeds from some of the plants to use next year and how do I do that?**

Yes, you can and probably should. Saving seed is a great way to ensure you can get the same varieties next year (some commercial seeds can be unavailable some years) and of course the seeds are free. It is so rewarding to see a healthy harvest in subsequent years from your own seed stock. There are a few things to consider first though.

First, do you know the variety of each of the plants that you grew? You will need to ensure that the original plant was grown from an 'open pollinated' seed. If the original seed that you grew was a 'hybrid' type, then the seeds will not come back the same as this year's growth and may revert to one or other of the original varieties from which it was bred with none of the characteristics that you are looking for. The original seed packet will tell you if it is a hybrid or not or if there is any legal restriction on reproducing from the seed that you purchased. If you know the name of the variety then the origin is easily researched on the internet.

Second, how many plants did you grow this year? Was it enough? Too many? This will give you an idea of how many seeds you will need to save for next year. I usually save twice as many seeds as the number of plants I need (to allow for any that don't germinate), plus some for sharing.

Third, are the plants from which you wish to save seed healthy? You don't want to pass on disease into next season.

How to collect Bean and Pea seeds

Edible Peas (*Pisum sativum*), whether sugar snap peas, shelling or snow peas plus all the varieties of bush and pole beans (*Phaseolus vulgaris*) produce seeds in pods and are all saved the same way. Allow some of the pods to dry on the plant until they turn brown, cream, or beige in colour and the outside skin is very dry. The bumps of the individual seeds inside can be clearly seen. You can often hear the seeds rattle inside if you gently shake a pod. On a dry day, harvest the pods and let them continue to dry indoors for a few days before removing the seeds from inside the pods. Lay them on a fine mesh rack or sheet of paper/newspaper and label each type. Many seed varieties look the same or similar, so labelling is important! Leave them for a week or two somewhere cool, dry and out of the sunlight (and critter proof), to ensure they are completely dry and then store them in a clearly marked paper bag, envelope, or container stating the variety and the year harvested. Check them in a couple of weeks to ensure there is no spoilage and remove any that may have developed mold (caused by not getting them dry enough before storage). Store the seeds somewhere cool, dry and secure from rodents or other critters until next season.

How to collect tomato seeds

Tomato seeds are saved by choosing healthy, ripe fruit that is the right size, colour and overall appearance for the variety that you are saving (assuming again that it is not a hybrid variety). Split the tomato open and scoop the seeds out into a small container. They will have some of the flesh of the tomato attached. Use a different container for each variety.

Add a little filtered tap water or bottled water to cover the seed and pulp. Leave the container indoors, covered and out of the sunlight for about 3-5 days. The seeds will start to ferment, and a white scum will form on the surface of the water. If the air temperature is warm the fermentation can happen even faster. This process cleans the jelly-like coating off the seeds and imitates the natural fermentation of overripe tomatoes that fall on the ground and germinate. Once the seeds have fermented, add a little more water and gently drain off the scum and any seeds floating on the surface. Tip the rest of the seeds into a fine sieve. Rinse them well under running water until all the pulp has been washed away and then spread them out to dry on a tray or plate. Do this separately for each variety. Label each variety and leave them to dry in a warm place. This will take several days. Give them a gentle stir around about halfway through the drying process and they will be less likely to stick together.

Once dry, store them in an airtight container (used, clean pill containers work well) or envelope labelled with the variety and year harvested and check them in a few weeks to ensure there is no spoilage from insufficient drying before storage. Store somewhere cool and dry ready for next year although properly dried and stored tomato seeds can last several years in storage.

Get into the habit of keeping a journal or notebook with the name and a description of each of the varieties you grow, how well they produced each year, what the weather was like each season, diseases or pests that affected your crop and whether the harvest met your expectations or needs. Just a few notes will help you decide which varieties are worth the effort of saving seeds for another year.

You can preserve extras to swap or donate to a seed bank or simply share with friends and community. It's an incredibly rewarding exercise and an important practice for future food security and seed diversity.

Sources:

https://seeds.ca/d/?n=seedlibrary/community/how_to_save_tomato_handout.pdf

My own seed saving practices of many years!