

# HARVESTING & STORING SEEDS

## WHEN ARE SEEDS RIPE FOR HARVESTING? (and how do I clean them?)

(1) **“Fruit” seeds** - These are seeds that are in the fruit that we eat (tomatoes, cucumber, squash, peppers, strawberries, melons, etc):

✓ **harvest when the FRUIT is ripe**

- fruits we eat ripe: tomatoes, melons, watermelon, red pepper, winter squash, dry bean, dry corn
- fruits we eat unripe: cucumbers, summer squash, green peppers, eggplant, peas, green beans, sweet corn

➡ **rule of thumb #1**: fruit is mature when skin changes color and/or hardens (typ. 3-5 wks past eating stage)

➡ **rule of thumb #2**: leave fruit on plant as long as possible; if weather or time requires you to harvest early, pick fruit and leave in warm, dry, airy place to finish maturing.

➡ **rule of thumb #3**: You can pull whole bean, pea plants and hang upside down in warm, dry, airy place to mature

✓ **if the seed is surrounded by pulp, separate seed from pulp.**

➡ **“wet pulp” seeds**: tomatoes and cucumbers: ferment seeds to release the gel sack encasing seed by:

1. scooping seeds into shallow container - LABEL CONTAINER
2. add water to cover
3. cover loosely and let sit about 4 days until mold layer forms
4. scoop off mold layer and discard
5. add water; let seeds settle (ripe ones drop to bottom), decant water and floating seeds; repeat as needed to remove any remaining pulp in water
6. spread ripe seeds on WAX paper - LABEL PAPER; let dry 1-2 days
7. place DRY seeds in envelope - LABEL envelope

- ➡ **“dry pulp” seeds:** squashes, eggplant. Remove pulp by washing them in bowl of water; rub seeds with hands to remove stringy fiber; ripe seeds will drop to bottom of bowl. Save these.

(2) **“Greens & root” seeds:** These are seeds from plants where we eat the greens or root.

✓ **let plant flower and go to seed.**

- ➡ **rule of thumb #1:** let seed mature on plant as long as possible; if weather or time requires you to harvest early, once seed has set, you can harvest whole plant, hang upside down in warm, dry, airy location to complete maturation.

- ➡ **rule of thumb #2:** know your plant’s seed dispersal mechanism. Some pods burst, and bagging the seed head while seed is maturing can be useful for capturing ripe seed

★ **garden planning tip:** “Greens & root” seed plants take a long time to flower and produce seed AND they continue to grow and take up space as they flower. Include this in your garden planning.

- ★ e.g., radishes and lettuce planted in April, will produce ripe seed by late September; the plants are 3-4 ft high by then

- ★ Many root vegetable and brassica plants produce seed in their second year (biennials), e.g., carrots, beets, parsnips; kales, collards, cauliflower, broccolis, etc.

✓ **winnow to separate seed from chaff.**

## HOW DO I STORE THEM?

✓ **cool, dry, dark location.**

- ✓ **LABEL!** At a minimum: variety and year. Other useful info can include latin name, favor notes, growing location, observations from the year

- ✓ Most seeds are viable for AT LEAST 3-5 years this way (exception is alliums - garlic, onion, chives) and parsnips. Freezing or vacuum sealing can prolong seed life.

Recommended book resource:  
*Back Garden Seed Saving* by Sue Stickland

## Resource prepared by:

