

Save Seeds for a Change!

BY BILL MAYNARD *VP National Gardening Assoc*

Fall brings to mind cooler temperatures, falling leaves, and end of summer vegetables, but the success of this year's crops doesn't have to end here. With the end of the growing season you may want to consider seed saving – letting some of your plants go to seed and saving some produce for its seeds.

Seed saving has been around for thousands of years, but today as big agriculture is planting less of a diverse crop, more of our heirloom seeds are vanishing each year.

Around the 1900's, approximately 1,500 plants provided food for the world's hungry; today over 90% of the world's nutrition is provided by 30 different plants, and only four (wheat, rice, corn and soybeans) provide 75% of the calories that we consume. Mono-cropping is reducing diversity and reducing varieties resistant to plant diseases.

Packaged seeds are grown in all parts of the country, but will they do well in our local climate? One way to ensure this is to save seeds from plants that do well in your own back yard or city. Select seeds from varieties that perform best in their own mini-ecosystems, ones that have proven themselves to you as to their color, taste and shape, and also in their pest-, disease- and climate-resistance. These are the varieties that will do well in your area in future years, and as you continue to save seeds from that variety each year, they will only get better.

Try saving seed from beans, lettuce, peas, peppers, or tomatoes. These vegetables offer the novice seed saver the best chance for success, as they are self-pollinating so you don't have to worry about preventing cross-pollination.

Some crops such as corn, cucumber, squash, pumpkin and radish can cross-pollinate and require separating the desired varieties to ensure that unwanted pollination doesn't occur. This can mean a distance of 1000 feet to a mile of separation depending on the variety, but plants can be closer if you plan to pollinate the flowers by hand.

Urban farmers can play an important role in saving the history of agriculture by saving seeds from varieties that perform best and by doing their part to plant a diverse garden in the same way that it has been done for thousands of years.

Be the change that you wish to see in the world...Save Seeds and Swap Them!

UPDATE: In the last issue of *Edible Sacramento*, I wrote on Sacramento's Community Garden ordinance and the hen keeping ordinance...just wanted you to know that both ordinances were passed by the Sacramento City Council. They must have been eating more carrots...as their vision is improving!

Speaking of community gardens, the City of Sacramento Department of Parks and Recreation opened two more community gardens this fall at Valley Hi Park, and Camellia Park, plus they opened the Martin Luther King Jr. community garden this past summer. For more information contact the City of Sacramento Community Garden Program at (916) 808-4943.

EVENT: The fourth annual Seed Swap sponsored by the Sacramento Area Community Garden Coalition will be held the first Tuesday in February, 2012 at the Shepard Garden and Arts Center 3330 McKinley Blvd. at 33rd Street from 6:30-8 pm. Plan to bring your favorite seeds to share – make sure that they are labeled. Also bring extra envelopes or small containers to take home some local favorites and heirlooms. There will also be free seeds for those who stop by to talk gardening or want to learn more.

Looking for a holiday gift for that special gardener? Hot off the press is the new 2012 Gardening Guide/Calendar by the Sacramento Master Gardeners.

"River Friendly Gardening" is the theme of this year's edition and is a must for all gardeners! It's full of tips, advice, frequently asked questions, suggestions and ideas. Get yours for \$10, plus \$3 for mailing, call (916) 875-6913 for more information.

For more information on composting, crop swaps, crop "growing" circles, community and school gardens, or front yard gardens, contact the Sacramento Area Community Garden Coalition at sacgc@ulink.net!

Bill Maynard, Food System Collaborative partner, sacgc@ulink.net