



Urban Harvest

Seeds Bring Success in Vegetable Gardening

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In order to be similar to their parents, perennials like fruit trees need to be transplanted into the garden months or years after someone grafted them or rooted cuttings. For annual plants that will die in a few months, this approach is too costly and inefficient. Vegetables that are transplanted for climate reasons are grown from seed.

One big advantage of planting seeds is seeds rarely transmit diseases the parents had. Also, seeds take far less labor and cost less per plant to get started than do transplants. And third, it is practical for a seed company to market hundreds of varieties of lettuce, but would struggle to sell 10 kinds of peaches. So with annuals, you can try far more kinds at a lower price while paying little for failed experiments.



New Mexico-type red chilies ripe enough to collect seeds

Unlike perennials, annuals must be replanted from living seed, and young seedlings with their tiny roots can die more easily in summer heat. So how do you keep seed alive? The short answer is to start with the freshest seed possible. Either purchase from a supplier that sells a lot of the variety or do your own seed saving. Put a date on the package. Then keep them dry and cool - preferably in packages in one or more tightly

closed jars in the refrigerator. Whatever you do, do not leave them sitting in the sun or in a vehicle.

Purchased seeds come in many kinds - organic, chemically grown, chemically treated and hybrid. Open-pollinated (OP) seeds mostly will come true to type if you plant seeds from these plants. Hybrids mostly won't. If you purchase an OP seed or get some given to you, you can stop spending money on seed. In our climate, some types of plants are much easier to collect seed from than others.



Open-pollinated seed-grown Marmande is one of the best "Beefsteak" tomatoes we grow.

Generally, they are ones that produce seed within a half-year or so.

Two places to buy excellent OP seed are [Seed Savers Exchange](http://seedsavers.org) (seedsavers.org) and Baker Creek Heirloom (rareseed.com). You can buy the book *Seed to Seed*, second edition, by [Susan Ashworth](#), that will tell you how to collect and save each type of seed.

It is easy to collect your own OP arugula, basil, beans, carrots, cilantro, cutting celery, corn, cucumbers, peas, okra, peppers, parsley, peanuts, squash and tomato seeds. Potatoes, sweet potatoes, yacon, Jerusalem artichokes, garlic and multiplying onions all are easy to grow from saved harvests. Lettuce, eggplant, collards, broccoli and most cabbage relatives are difficult, but not impossible.



Open-pollinated Bloody Butcher tomatoes are early, reliable and delicious addition to the garden.

If you want to get started, next winter try the pepper *Tolli's Sweet* and the tomatoes *Bloody Butcher*, *Jaune Flame*, *Martino's Roma* or *Marmande*.

Or if you can find a fully ripe vegetable, save the seed of a favorite bought at the farmers market or supermarket.



Texas wild tomato seeds being prepared for saving.



This New Mexico-type red chile plant was grown from a supermarket pepper.

Urban Harvest produces this column. Learn about gardening classes, community and school gardens, farmers markets, fruit tree sales and more at urbanharvest.org.