

Storing Seeds

With the recent downturn in the economy, many local garden centers have seen an increased interest from customers wanting to store vegetable seeds in case of an unforeseen emergency. If you have had this in mind, there are several things to be aware of to be successful. These include proper storage, purchasing the correct type of seed, learning how to start seed indoors and in the garden.

The most important factors in determining how long vegetable seeds can be stored are the temperature and humidity level. Cooler temperatures and low humidity encourages longer shelf life. Several companies actually market vacuum-packed seed, which if kept frozen, may last for up to twenty years. However, it is wise to use the seed more frequently than this.

Another aspect to consider is if it is worth harvesting your own seed from garden plants. This was done in the past when seed was not readily available from stores. However, it is easier and more time efficient to just buy extra seed and store it. Knowing when to harvest seed, how to clean it and separate it from the plant can be challenging.

Another issue that can be confusing is whether to use open-pollinated or hybrid seed. Open pollinated seed come back as the same variety from year to year; whereas seed from hybrid plants will either be sterile or not come back as the same variety when replanted. Some advantages to hybrid plants are that they generally have higher yields and are more disease resistant. They are also the most common type of seed available at local garden centers.

A final thing to consider is timing seed planting to maximize the amount you can produce. In Cache Valley, the first week of June is traditionally when warm season crops can be placed in the garden. But if you are not planning on purchasing transplants from the garden center, it is wise to know what can be sewn directly into the garden and what must be started earlier, such as many varieties of tomatoes and peppers. It is not hard to start them indoors, but you should not wait for an emergency to learn to do so.

If you would like to learn more about starting seed indoors and plant propagation, an upcoming hands-on workshop may be of interest. It is held at USU and is presented by local Master Gardeners and the Utah Native Plant Society. Registration is \$20 and participants will receive seeds and plant trays. More information is available on our Web site at <http://extension.usu.edu/cache/htm/horticulture>. Native and drought adapted plants will be given out but the principals are applicable to many other areas.