

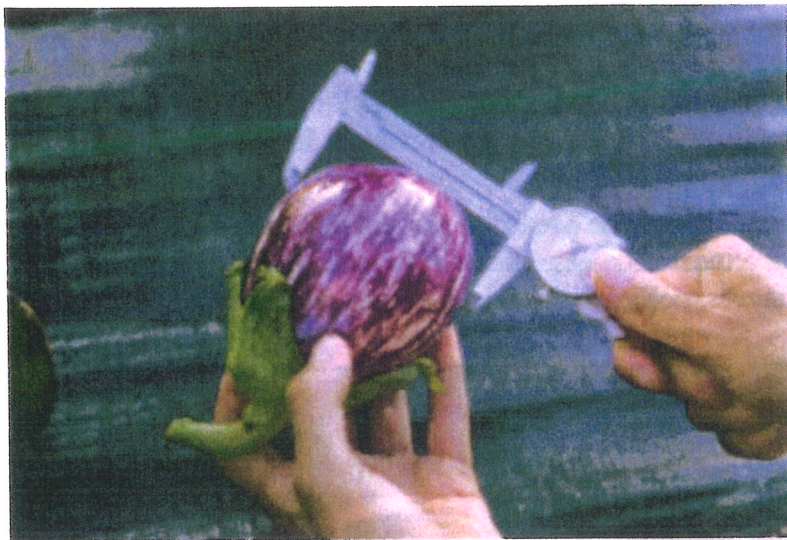
Know how your plants pollinate.

Understanding how garden plants are pollinated will help you prevent cross-pollination. Some plants will self-pollinate before the flowers are even open, making them less susceptible to cross-pollination. Examples of “selfers” are tomatoes, peas, and beans. (Note that on occasion, insects can cross-pollinate “selfers.”) Insect-pollinated plants (squash or cucumbers) or wind-pollinated (corn or spinach) are more likely to cross-pollinate.

To produce seeds that are true-to-type, some intervention may be needed to prevent unwanted cross-pollination between different varieties of the same species. For lettuce and peas, place a little extra space between varieties. Others may need methods like larger isolation distances, pollination barriers, or hand-pollination.



Understand market maturity vs. seed maturity.



Some fruits are market mature, or ready for eating, long before the seed is mature. Examples of these include carrots, cucumbers, eggplants, peas, green beans, summer squash, and cabbage. For example, a carrot is biannual. The carrot plant must grow for a longer period, two years, so that the seed can reach the proper maturity. When you harvest the seed, a carrot plant can be up to four feet tall and one year old. For this reason, seed savers need to leave a few plants of these crops to fully mature in the garden when they want to save seeds. The seeds of dry-fruited crops like grains, lettuce, and beans can be harvested once they are dry and hard.

Know how to harvest seeds.

Garden crops can be classified as either dry-fruited or wet-fruited. Collecting seeds from dry-fruited crops can be as simple as going out to the garden, handpicking a few mature seedpods, and bringing them into the house for further drying and cleaning. Fruits from wet-fruited crops must be picked when their seeds are mature. Either crush or cut open the harvested fruit, and then extract the seeds from the flesh and pulp before the seeds are dried.

