

Terminology

Heirloom Seed

Heirloom seeds, also called heritage seeds, are generally defined as varieties that have been in cultivation for 50 years or more. Heirloom seeds are often rare or endangered because they exist in very small quantities and are generally not offered for sale by larger seed companies. Heirloom seeds are more often preserved by gardeners, farmers and specialty seed companies interested in preserving and promoting biodiverse seed selections.

Hybrid Seed

Hybridization occurs when the pollen of two different species or varieties is crossed by human intervention. The first generation of a hybridized plant cross generally produces higher yields than the parent varieties due to a phenomenon called 'hybrid vigour'. However, any seed produced by hybrid plants is genetically unstable and cannot be saved for use in following years, therefore hybrid seeds must purchase new every year.

Organic Seed

Organic seeds are grown using organic growing methods and without the use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides.

Self-Pollinating Plants

These plants can pollinate themselves without help from insects, wind, or other plants. Because of their low risk of cross-pollination, they are great for first-time seed savers.

Examples: Beans, peas, lettuce, and tomatoes.

Open-Pollinated Plants

Open-pollinated varieties are pollinated naturally by insects, wind, or animals. They will grow true to type if they are not cross-pollinated with a different variety of the same species.

Many open-pollinated plants (especially in the squash, cucumber, melon, and corn families) cross-pollinate.

Tip: If you're growing more than one variety of an open-pollinated species nearby, the seeds may not produce plants like the parent. Use isolation techniques, timing, or distance if you plan to save seed from these crops.

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Biodiversity

Biodiversity is the variety of all living things. In the garden, plant biodiversity can be seen in the different species of crops (e.g. beans, peas, lettuce etc.) as well as the different varieties of each crop.

Crop

A crop is a plant that is harvested by a human at some point in its growth stage to be used as food, either for people or for domestic animals.

Species

A species is a group of living organisms that are so similar that they would be able to reproduce successfully together. For example, all domestic cats might not look the same, but they are a single species because they can mate and make kittens. Cats and dogs can't reproduce together, so they are different species. In the garden, tomatoes and peppers are different species because they cannot reproduce successfully together.

Seed Banks

A place where plant seeds are safely saved and stored. Seed banks can be small schools or home seed banks, community banks or large international banks. Prominent global seed banks include the Millennium Seed Bank at Kew Gardens in London and the Svalbard Global Seed Bank in the Norwegian Arctic.

Trait/Characteristic

The unique qualities of a particular variety of crops.

Variety

Varieties, also called cultivars, are the different kinds that exist within one crop species. Think of jalapeno peppers vs. bell peppers, or cherry tomatoes vs. Roma tomatoes. There are thousands of different bean varieties and thousands of different tomato varieties even though most of us are only familiar with the limited varieties we see at the grocery store.