How To Save Bean, Lettuce, Pea, & Tomato Seeds

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Seed Library

Bean, Pea, Lettuce, Tomato

These vegetables offer the beginning seed saver the best chance for successful seed saving. They produce seed the same season as planted and are mostly self-pollinating, minimizing the need to be mindful of preventing cross-pollination. Always save seeds from healthy plants that bear heavily.

Tomato – *Lycopersicon lycopersicum*

**Plant:** Cross-pollination between modern tomato varieties seldom occurs, except in potato leaf varieties which should be separated by the length of the garden. Do not save seeds from double fruits on beefsteak types.

**Harvest:** Pick and fully wash ripened tomato. Cut the fruit across the middle, not the stem and blossom ends. Squeeze the seeds and jelly like substance into a jar or container.

Set aside the jar to ferment, usually one to three days. During this time the seeds will become covered with a layer of white or gray mold (warning: it may smell).

Once the surface is completely covered add enough water to double the mixture and stir vigorously. The viable seeds will sink to the bottom of the container, allowing the moldy pulp to be poured off. Add more water to the container and repeat the process until only clean seeds remain.

You may pour your clean seeds into a strainer that has holes smaller than the seeds if additional drying is necessary. Wipe the bottom of the strainer on a towel to remove as much moisture as possible. Spread seeds out to dry on a surface other than soft paper, cloth or non-rigid plastic as it is difficult to remove seeds from these surfaces. Coffee filters work well, as do screens. Stir seeds twice daily and do not place in direct sunlight or in an oven. Seeds will start to germinate if not dried quickly. A gentle breeze can speed the drying process. Seeds are dry enough for storage when they break under stress. If they bend, they’re not ready.

**Storage:** Tomato seeds remain viable for four to ten years. Completely dried seeds should be sealed in an airtight container and stored in a cool, dry area.
Bean - *Phaseolus vulgaris* – include snap beans, string beans, wax beans, shelly beans, kidney beans and all kinds of dry beans.

**Plant:** Ideally, different varieties of *P. vulgaris* should not be planted side by side, although cross pollination is rarely observed.

**Harvest:** Leave pods on plant until brown, crisp and dry. If frost threatens, pull entire plant, root first, and hang in cool, dry location until pods are brown. Pick the pods from the plant when the beans inside are extremely hard. Split the pods by hand to remove the seeds. Separate seeds from chaff (pieces of stem, leaf and other debris). Seeds should be dry enough to pass the shatter test (hit with hammer, if it shatters it's ready). Seeds that mash need further drying.

**Storage:** Store your dried bean seeds in a labeled jar, envelope, or other container in a cool, dark, dry place. Bean seeds will maintain a 50% germination rate for four years when stored properly.

Lettuce - *Lactuca sativa*

**Plant:** There is only a slight chance of cross pollination between lettuces. Some standards suggest separating different varieties 12’ to 25’ to ensure purity.

**Harvest:** Allow plants to bolt and form seed stalks. Seeds are ready for harvest 2-3 weeks after plant has bolted and flowered. Leave the plants in the ground and harvest seeds over the course of a few days by visiting each plant and shaking the seed heads into a paper bag that is then stored in a dry area. Label bags clearly to avoid any mix-ups when working with more than one variety. You may also cut the entire plant when most of the seed is ripe and place head first into a paper bag. When seeds are totally dry, shake the heads vigorously within the bag. More than half of the seed will contain white lettuce feathers and chaff. Use a fine mesh screen that will allow seeds to pass through. Shake the screen lightly while gently blowing feathers away. Lettuce seed should break, not bend under stress. Seed that bends needs to be dried further.

**Storage:** Store lettuce seeds in a labeled jar, envelope, or other container in a cool, dark, dry place. Lettuce seeds will remain viable for three years when stored properly.

Peas - *Pisum sativum*

**Plant:** Cross-pollination by insects is possible but rare because pollination occurs before the flower opens. Ideally, different varieties should be separated 50 feet to ensure pure seed.

**Harvest:** Allow pods to dry on plant. Separate seeds from pods by hand. Remove any chaff.

**Storage:** Pea seeds will retain 50% viability for three years when stored in cool, dry, dark conditions.

All seeds should be stored in an airtight, dry container. Seeds can be sorted into small envelopes and numerous packets may be stored in one container. Canning jars are a good choice.