



Homes & Gardens

Town Tribune Weekly Guide To Fall Living

We Asked Pros How to Store Flower Seeds So They're Ready to Sprout Next Spring

Saving seeds is an easy, economical way to fill your garden with more of the plants you love. However, it's not just how you harvest the seeds that's important. How you store flower seeds can have a major impact on whether they grow successfully when you sow them the following spring.

Follow these expert-approved seed storage tips to maintain viability and maximize germination rates.

Separate the Chaff:

When you harvest flower seeds, you'll inevitably also collect a lot of plant seed casings and waste material (chaff), such as dried husks, petals, and stems. Removing excess moisture-retaining plant material helps minimize mold and the chance of your seeds going bad while in storage.

For small-scale home seed storage, don't worry about achieving commercial levels of seed cleanliness.

"You can [remove the chaff] by vigorously shaking the bags [holding your collected seeds], rubbing the seedheads on a mesh screen, or separating the seeds by hand," says Alison O'Connor, extension professor of horticulture.

Fully Dry the Seeds:

"If the seed has any moisture, it may rot and spoil the entire batch, so make sure it's dry," O'Connor stresses.

You can air-dry small quantities of seeds in breathable paper bags in front of a fan, or on screens or racks in a sunny, well-ventilated location. The seeds will dry in anything from a few days to a few weeks depending on the seed species and how damp they are when you collect them.

"To get the seeds dry to a moisture level of 8%, the recommendation is to dry them at 100°F for six hours," O'Connor says. It's possible to dry them using a conventional oven set as low as possible with the door open or using the proofing function, but this will take longer.

Store Seeds in Breathable Packets:

Horticulture extension specialist Celeste Scott recommends avoiding plastic bags or wax-lined seed storage packets, as these materials can trap moisture. Opt for breathable packets instead.

Store in a Cool, Dark Location:

Once your dried-out seeds are in their breathable packet, keeping them in a consistently cool, dark, dry location until the following spring can be enough.

Low heat and humidity help preserve your seed viability, so Scott recommends picking a closet drawer and not a sunny windowsill.

"While seeds can be stored in a basement or cellar, keeping seeds in the fridge works well, as long as the temperature is below 40°F,"

O'Connor says.

If you want to get really scientific about whether your selected location is suitable for seed storage, the US Forest Service recommends that the sum of the temperature combined with the humidity percentage shouldn't exceed 100.

Use an Airtight Container in Humid Conditions:

If you live in a high-humidity region, O'Connor and Scott both recommend placing your paper packets of seeds inside a large airtight container. This can reduce fluctuations in moisture levels and lower the likelihood of condensation and mold developing, especially if you want to store your seeds for more than one season.

Know How Long Your Seeds Will Last:

How long seeds last can vary widely depending on the flower species you're trying to grow and the storage conditions.

"Most perennial flowers last for 2 to 4 years and annuals can last 1 to 3 years," O'Connor says. "Some species that only store for one year include sweet corn, lettuce, onions, leeks, and parsnips, and long-storage seed includes tomatoes, cucumbers, and beets."

She explains that some seeds are difficult to store for any period of time, including salvia (sage), geranium, and delphinium.

However, even seeds with naturally good longevity can lose viability faster when exposed to excess heat or humidity. For seeds you have stored for several years, expect germination rates to gradually decline and consider sowing more than you normally would.

Store in Freezer for Maximum Longevity:

"If you're wanting to save seed for longer than two years, you need to consider putting a desiccating packet into that airtight container and placing it in a freezer," Scott says.

Most importantly, your seeds must be completely dry before freezing, as any remaining moisture can freeze and damage living cells.

When you're ready to sow, take the sealed container from the freezer and allow it to reach room temperature for several hours before opening it. Keeping the container sealed while the seeds warm helps prevent moisture in the surrounding air from condensing on the cold seeds.



TOWN TRIBUNE'S KITCHEN CORNER

Sweet Potato Chicken Chili

Ingredients:

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 sweet onion, diced
- 1 bell pepper, diced
- 4 garlic cloves, minced
- kosher salt and pepper
- 2 (4 ounce) cans diced green chiles
- 2 large sweet potatoes, peeled and chopped
- 2 cups cooked, shredded chicken
- 2 teaspoons smoked paprika
- 1 teaspoon chili powder
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- ½ teaspoon onion powder
- ½ teaspoon garlic powder
- 28 ounces crushed fire roasted tomatoes
- 2 (14 ounce) cans black beans, drained and rinsed
- 4 to 6 cups chicken stock for topping: grated cheddar green onions, chives, sour cream, fritos, tortilla chips, cilantro

Instructions:

- Heat the olive oil in a large stock pot over medium heat. Add the onions, peppers and garlic with a big pinch of salt and pepper. Cook, stirring often, until softened, about 5 to



6 minutes.

- Add in the green chiles, potatoes and chicken. Stir to combine. Add in the paprika, chili powder, cumin, onion powder and garlic powder. Stir until it coats everything and cook for 3 to 4 minutes, stirring often.

- Pout in the tomatoes, beans and 4 cups of the stock. Bring the mixture to a boil then reduce it to a simmer. If you need more stock to cover everything, feel free to add it in. But you don't want to make it too brothly!

- Cover and simmer for 20 minutes, or until the potatoes are tender. Taste and season with additional salt, pepper or spices as desired.

- Serve topped with grated cheese, green onions, tortilla chips or your favorite toppings!



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