

Plant Wise

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
Extension and Outreach

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Saving Flower Seeds

One of the last and most meaningful “end of season” tasks is saving flower seeds for planting next year. This is one of the reasons why open-pollinated heirlooms, flowers and favorites have been around for decades.



Every year, one or two varieties of heirloom flowers disappear from seed catalogs. At that point, if you haven't saved seed from the flowers you grew the season before, you're out of luck unless you can find someone who's saved seed.

What flowers are worth saving? The answer, of course is, any that your family enjoys.

Collect your own flower seed for planting next year. Here's how.

Saving flower seeds is pretty easy, but here is some advice to get started. The basic steps for seed saving are harvesting, drying, cleaning and storing.

Harvesting Flower Seeds

If you observe your plants closely throughout the growing season, you will know when the seeds are ready to harvest. Harvesting seeds at the right time greatly increases their viability. Seeds are produced in either seed heads or pods.

You can tell when seed pods are ready to harvest because they turn dry and brittle - just before they split open and spill their contents. A good example

is sweet peas. If you pick the pods too early, the seeds will be green. But if you wait too long, the pods will pop open, scattering the seeds. Choose ripe pods by feel. They should start to split when you squeeze them. Poppy seeds are produced in pods that resemble salt shakers. They are ready to harvest when the pod snaps off the stem. If it bends, give it more time.

Flowers like zinnia and cosmos produce seed heads. When the seeds are ripe, the seed head shatters. It's time to harvest them when the seed head falls apart in your hand when you rub it. Color is another clue. When calendula seeds ripen, they turn from green to brown.



When going out to harvest seeds, use small or snack-size *Ziploc* bags, which are perfect for small amounts of seed. A helpful hint, if you know which seeds you are going to harvest, pre-mark the bags so you will know which is which!

Drying Flower Seeds

Never harvest wet seeds. It's better to wait for dry weather. Seeds should be dried in a well-ventilated room with a temperature between 70 and 95 degrees. It's not always necessary to remove seeds from pods before drying, as long as they were not harvested wet. (One exception is *lavatera*. Their seeds may get moldy if they are not cleaned immediately.)



When harvesting pods from plants like lupine, place in a bowl and cover with a piece of cheesecloth or other lightweight fabric that will allow air circulation while preventing the exploding pods from shooting the seeds out of the bowl. Or put them in a closed paper bag.

Small quantities of seed can be dried in plastic cups or on small plates. It's important to have air circulation. Spread the seeds to a thin layer so they will dry evenly. Turn or stir them every few days. Most seeds require 2-6 weeks to dry completely.

Cleaning Flower Seeds

Seeds can be cleaned after drying for a few days. After cleaning, they will still need more drying time. Here are some examples for cleaning seeds:



Poppy: Place the pods in a gallon-size plastic bag. Close the top, and shake vigorously until the seeds fall out of the pods. Dump the contents into a strainer held over a bowl. Shake the strainer until all the seeds fall through, then throw away the empty pods. Go outside the house and slowly pour the seeds back and forth between two bowls to blow away the dust. Spread clean seeds on a plate or cookie sheet to finish drying.

Zinnia: After drying for a few days, loosen the seeds from the chaff by rubbing the seed heads vigorously between gloved hands. Then, just like

with the poppies, go outside and using 2 bowls, remove the chaff.



Storing Flower Seeds

Once the seeds are dry, place them in small baggies or envelopes. Make sure to clearly mark with the flower name and date. They should be stored in a cool, dark, dry place until next spring. Whether you're new to seed saving or want to brush up on the practice, these seed saving basics are a smart place to start.



Dividing Your Perennials in the Fall

Dividing perennial plants on a regular basis has advantages for both the gardener and their plants. For starters, it's an excellent way to keep plants healthy and manageable over time.

Perennials that remain in the soil for too many years begin to experience issues. As their roots become overcrowded, it becomes difficult to absorb the nutrients and moisture plants need from the soil.

When this happens, not only do plants struggle to grow, their blooming cycles diminish, or in some cases, stop all together.



But dividing your perennials ever few years solves this issue while keeping root structures healthy and blooms strong, it also creates additional plants to

plant in new beds or to give to fellow gardeners. Here are just a few perennials that are best divided in the fall. Astilbe, Bleeding Heart, Bearded Iris, Daylily, Japanese Iris, Lily-of-the-Valley, Oriental Lily, Peony, Siberian Iris and Veronica.

Select Healthy, Mature Plants

The best way to create a strong new start from a perennial plant is dividing from a healthy, mature plant. Select larger plants with good foliage and strong growth habits.

This will allow for plenty of root area to create new stock, giving the transplants an easier time to re-establish.

Work When the Soil Is Dry

Don't attempt to transplant after heavy rains or watering. Allow the soil to dry out a bit before digging up plants.

Wet, overly soggy soil makes it easy for mud to compact onto roots. This, in turn, makes it hard for plants to get the oxygen and nutrients needed for survival.

Dig Outside Of the Root Zone

When digging out plants, always remove as much of the root mass as possible. The roots of a perennial plant are its lifeline, and the more you remove, the better chance of survival for new divisions.



Use a sharp shovel to dig an inch or two out from the edge of the root zone. For most perennials, their root zone will be equal to the outer most edge of the foliage.

Loosen the soil around the entire plant first, and then dig deep under the roots to pop the plant up from the ground.

Divide Perennials from the Bottom

Instead of trying to split perennial plants from the top down, split from the roots through the plant. Once your perennial has been lifted from the ground, turn it on its side, so the foliage is out of the way. Next, using a sharp shovel or knife, divide by cutting down through the roots.

By flipping the plant on its side, it reveals the entire root structure, allowing you to split the plant in even sections. By cutting the roots in like-size sections, new plants will grow to about the same size as they

mature. This is great for keeping flowerbeds looking uniform and well-groomed.



Transplant Quickly

Don't keep transplants lying around for days to plant. The quicker a divided perennial is planted, the better chance it has to settle in and establish a few new roots before winter.

Transplant to a new location as soon as you dig and divide, being careful not to let the roots dry out completely. Cutting the tops back to 6 inches on Iris and Daylilies when transplanting will help the plant recover faster.



Build Nutrients in Your Planting Holes with Compost

When transplanting, always add compost into the new planting hole along with the soil in the beds. Compost is not only full of nutrients, it also helps retain moisture around the roots of plants

Even more, it's loose and airy make-up is perfect for new roots to become easily established. When transplanting, fill all of our transplant holes back in with a 50/50 mix of soil and compost.

And don't worry if the new transplants foliage drops off or dies back in the fall. They are simply heading into dormancy. But by getting these plants in the ground in the fall, it allows the roots to be ready to grow strong the following spring.

Creating a Holding Bed

So what if you don't have a place for your new plants just yet? Then create a holding bed! You can use a small corner of your property, or an unused

space in your vegetable garden to hold plants now until you need them next year. Holding beds are a great way to establish and keep new plants over winter. It's also a great way to give a few plants away next spring to friends and family as a little spring gift!



Some more September Garden Tips

Mid to late September is a great time to add accent plants, like mums and asters, that will provide autumn colors in the landscape. Use them along with cool-colored ornamental cabbages and kales in containers as well.



Examine houseplants carefully for insect pests before bringing them back inside. Give them a good grooming if necessary. You may want to spray plants with insecticidal soap after hosing off the foliage. Let the plants dry before applying the soap. Move the houseplants to their indoor locations before the furnace gets turned on so they can start becoming used to the lower indoor light and humidity levels.

Pot bound plants will appreciate larger living quarters. You might as well repot crowded plants now while this task can be done enjoyably outdoors.



Visit a local nursery or garden center and select spring flowering bulbs to add to your gardens. Plant

the bulbs among perennials, under trees and shrubs, or in larger groups for a splendid spring show. Choose colors that complement other spring flowering plants as well as nearby plantings. Work a little Bulb Booster or 5-10-10 into the bottom of the planting holes.

Pot up or propagate herbs to bring indoors for winter use. Weed and mulch perennial beds using a loose organic material such as bark chips or leaves to keep down weeds, preserve moisture, and give roots a longer time to grow before the soil freezes.

Take cuttings of begonias, geraniums, coleus, impatiens, and fuchsias to grow as houseplants. Cuttings can be made one-quarter inch below a node, which is where the leaf meets the stem, dipped in rooting hormone and inserted into a potting medium in a bright location but not in direct sunlight and kept moist.

Smaller tender perennials, like some fuchsias, can just be cut back and overwintered in cellar windows as long as not allowed to completely dry out. If frost threatens, bring houseplants indoors.

Late season cabbage and beets can stay in the garden until a light frost for best flavor. Some root crops, including certain varieties of beets, carrots and parsnips, may be left in the ground for storage. Wait until temperatures drop and growth stops and cover with a thick layer of straw or leaves. Harvest as needed during the winter. This may not be an option in areas with heavy vole populations.



As tomatoes end their production, cut down plants, pick up any debris and put dead/diseased plant parts in the trash or take to a landfill. Many diseases will over-winter on old infected leaves and stems so these are best removed from the property.

Cover beds with untreated lawn clippings and leaves picked up during fall mowing. Be prepared to cover remaining vegetables with landscape fabric or cloth if an untimely frost occurs.





Cheesy Kale & Spinach Stuffed Pork Chops

YIELD: Serves 4 PREP TIME: 20 minutes

BAKE: 350° F

INGREDIENTS:

4 teaspoons canola oil, divided
 4 ounces baby spinach (about 4 cups)
 3 ounces kale, chopped (about 3 cups)
 2 ounces 1/3-less-fat cream cheese
 1/3 cup whole milk
 2 teaspoons all-purpose flour
 1/2 cup low-fat mozzarella cheese, shredded
 4 (5 ounce) boneless center-cut pork chops
 1 teaspoon thyme leaves
 Salt & Pepper to taste

Directions: Step 1

Heat 2 teaspoons oil in a large ovenproof skillet over medium-high. Add spinach and kale; stirring until completely wilted, 2 to 3 minutes. Remove spinach mixture from skillet, and set aside. Whisk together cream cheese, milk and flour in a small bowl. Whisk cream cheese mixture into skillet. Bring to a simmer and cook, whisking constantly for 20 seconds. Return spinach mixture to skillet, and stir to combine. Stir in shredded mozzarella cheese and cook 30 seconds. Remove from heat.

Step 2 Cut a horizontal slit through thickest portion of each pork chop to form a pocket. Stuff each chop with 1/3 cup spinach mixture. Sprinkle with salt and pepper to taste.

Step 3 Preheat oven to 350° F. Wipe skillet clean, and heat remaining 2 teaspoons oil over medium-high; cook 1 side of the chops in hot oil 3 minutes. Flip chops over, and transfer to oven. Bake until cheese is melted and a thermometer inserted in thickest part of pork (NOT stuffing) registers 140° F, about 5 minutes. Transfer chops to a platter, and sprinkle with thyme. Let chops rest 5 minutes before serving.

Do you Remember When?

On those early fall days, when the house was filled with the wonderful smell of freshly baked apple pie! Your Mom and Grandma were preparing apple pies to freeze for later. The kitchen had transformed into an assembly line. Mom, mixing and making crust while you and your Grandma were having fun racing to see who could peel an apple the fastest. You with a potato peeler and Grandma with a paring knife! She was a whiz! Around the apple she would go, peeling the apple in one long connected peel, and then she was done!!

The apples were then cut and sliced into a huge bowl. Pie dough was divided and rolled out. The bottom crust was put into a foil pie pan. Apples were measured, placed into another bowl where sugar and spices were mixed. Into the waiting pie pan it went, dabbed with butter and covered with the top crust. The fancy zig zag trim was pinched to seal the juices in. A little bit of milk was smeared on top and sprinkled with sugar. Your Mom then took her knife and made 3 curved slices into the top crust! Two for steam to escape and one more because that's how her mother had taught her! She then added the fancy dashes around each slit, making it look like 3 wheat heads.

Next the pies were carefully wrapped in foil and placed into individual bags, labeled and dated on top, then placed into the freezer. Of course one was baked immediately, because everyone was hungry for that good tasting sweet juicy apple pie!



Different varieties of apples make different tasting pies. Today in the store, there is usually a chart telling which variety is better for baking or eating fresh. The pies we made used "Early Harvester" apples. They were green apples that turned slightly yellow when ripe, around the end of August. Take a look into your old family cookbooks and see if there is an old traditional apple pie recipe. And as the use to say, **"Give it a whirl Merle!"**



September UP COMMING EVENTS

- **September 1, 8, 15, 22, 29** Glenwood Farmers Market, Wednesdays, 4-6:30 pm
- **September 11-19** Clay County Fair, 1401 4th Avenue West, Spencer, IA 51301
- **The third week** in September is National Indoor Plant Week. Take some time to get your houseplants in tip top condition. Give all your plants a good grooming and check for any pests.



September GARDENING TO DO LIST

- **Collect** and sow seeds from perennials and hardy annuals
- **Dig up** remaining potatoes in the garden.
- **Divide** perennials. Share with family and friends.
- **Mid-August to Mid-September** is the best time to seed new lawns. Continue to water the new seeding.
- **Plant** garlic. Mulch with straw.
- **Follow** ISU's "Preserve the Taste of Summer" guidelines for canning and freezing produce, fruits and meat. (Links to PM's under ISU Publications)
- **Place netting** over ponds before the fall leaves start dropping.
- **Pick** fall raspberries
- **Continue** to water newly planted trees and shrubs.
- **Keep** birdbaths full. Clean and fill regularly with fresh water to help keep from spreading diseases.



Resources for Horticulture information Iowa State University Publications

PM 1366	Canning: Fruit Spreads
HS 21	Canning: Salsa
PM 1368	Canning: Pickles
PM 1044	Canning: Vegetables
PM 1031	Canning: Meat, Poultry, Wild Game and Fish
PM 638	Canning and Freezing: Tomatoes
PM 1043	Canning: Fruits
RG 304	Late Season Perennial Flowers
PM 1398	Harvesting and Drying Flowers
PD 0054	Tomato Diseases and Disorders
PM 1895	Tomatillos
PM 534	Planting and harvesting times for Garden vegetables
RG 319	When to Divide Perennials
PM 1313	Peonies
RG 304	Late Season Perennials
PM 1072	Establishing a Lawn from Seed
PM 1892	Melons

Horticulture Publications on-line

<https://www.extension.iastate.edu/store/ListCategories>



ISU Hotline Links and Numbers

Hotlines available for all

Iowa Concern 800-447-1985 Financial questions, legal education, stress counseling, crisis/disaster resources and referral (24 hrs - all days)

Beginning Farmer Center 877-BFC-1999 Program to match beginning and retiring farmers (8 a.m. to 5 p.m.)

Teen Line 800-443-8336 Personal and health-related information and referral (24 hrs - all days)

Iowa 2-1-1 211 Resource referral for housing, health, food, family, transportation, employment, education, and legal assistance (24 hrs - all days)

Hot lines available for Iowa Residents Only

AnswerLine Toll-free: 800-262-3804 Local: 515-296-5883 Questions relating to home and family (9 am-noon & 1-4 pm)
Iowa Healthy Families 800-369-2229 Health information and referral (24 hrs - all days)

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