

Deeply Rooted in Native Seed Collecting
September 18, 2024

Q & A

Question: My main question is about direct sowing which I haven't had much luck with. Are there any tricks to it or more just luck? Is it better to direct sow in fall or spring?

Answer: For seeds that need cold stratification, it's best to sow in the fall. Cold stratification is the period of cold (typically ranging from 30-90 days) that a seed needs to overcome dormancy and to germinate.

Wild Ones Chesapeake Bay is planning a virtual presentation in January on seed germination methods: direct sowing, winter sowing, indoor sowing with grow lights, greenhouse germination, etc. Date and time TBD. Also, WOCB has two in-person winter sowing workshops scheduled:

St. Mary's Public Library - Leonardtown, January 18th, 10 – 11:30 am

St. Mary's Public Library - Lexington Park, February 22nd, 2 – 4 pm

Question: Which sedges or grasses are easiest to grow from seeds?

Answer: Plantain sedge was mentioned as seeding among one attendee's garden; another mentioned that purple love grass is easy to propagate from seed.

Question: Any suggestions for gathering seeds from nimblewill in particular?

Answer: Grasses are shatterers and can be stripped from the plant when ripe. If they don't strip easily at first, go back in a few days and try again.

Question: What's the duration of short-term vs long-term storage?

Answer: Short-term storage is typically for seeds I'll sow within a few months or during the upcoming winter sowing season. Long term storage may be for years, and I typically store in plastic pill bottles at room temperature.

Question: About pawpaw seeds, do I sow them immediately after I eat the fruit? What other plant seeds are hydrophilic and what's the best way to keep them properly stored long term?

Answer: Clean seeds thoroughly and store with damp paper towel in the crisper drawer of the refrigerator. Check every two weeks to make sure the paper towel stays moist, and the seeds don't get moldy. I winter sow these seeds on or immediately after the winter solstice for two reasons: 1) they are hydrophilic and 2) they require 120 days or more cold stratification. Check out this [reference](#) for pawpaw seeds.

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You can sow in the ground in the fall to allow them to be naturally cold stratified, but you risk animals digging them up and eating them.

Other hydrophilic seeds include seeds of spring ephemerals (which should be sown in the spring shortly after collection) and persimmon (which I handle like pawpaw).

Question: Any kind words about how flexible seeds are? I'm feeling panicked about harvesting seeds when they are immediately ready but am sure I'm collecting a little early and a little late. There must be species which are very particular, but in general, what is the germination rate I can expect? I use organza bags and am targeting the coneheads, crumbly coneheads, and shatterers primarily.

Answer: Some people will collect seeds before the seeds turn brown, but I prefer to wait. There is no risk for seeds overripening on the plant, but the risk of the wind, rain, or critters taking the seeds is greater the longer you wait. Germination rates will depend on the species, collection techniques, seed processing, and seed storage. Some seeds are just hard to germinate. [Toadshade Wildflower Farm](#) has information on their website on how easily seeds germinate.

Most importantly, don't panic. The more you collect, the more you'll recognize when seeds are ready. When seeds mature gradually, organza bags are helpful, such as with the seeds of garden phlox (*Phlox paniculata*).

Question: If you don't transfer seeds to your plastic or glass containers for long-term storage, how long would you expect them to remain viable in an envelope?

Answer: Viability is seed dependent; they are living and breathing and using up their carbohydrate stores. Warmth will accelerate.

Question: When it comes time to sharing the seeds you have in long term storage, how do you store them for sharing?

Answer: Small plastic zipper bags or paper seed envelopes are convenient for dry seeds.

Question: Would a beverage fridge work for storing? More consistent conditions if they're opened less?

Answer: I'm not familiar with a beverage fridge, but I've been told commercial refrigerators typically provide more stable temperatures.

Question: Any advice about harvesting seed heads now and storing as seed heads vs harvesting immediately? Should seed heads be kept in the fridge vs cool room temp?

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Answer: Once collected, seeds heads can remain in paper bags outside of the fridge for weeks or months until ready to be cleaned and packaged. Do not store seed heads in paper bags in the fridge; the paper may attract and hold moisture.

Question: Looking to collect saltmarsh fleabane seeds...any advice?

Answer: Fleabane is a member of the Asteraceae family and produces seeds attached to fluff (or pappus), so the collection tips for fluffy seeds apply. Seed heads can be covered with organza bags before the totally fluff out to prevent seeds from being carried off by winds when fully fluffed.

Question: Serviceberry seeds - would you treat them the same way as Paw-paw?

Answer: I'm not familiar with serviceberry seeds, so I'm not sure if they're hydrophilic. The fruit of the serviceberry is technically a type of "pome" (in the same family as apples). I'll provide an update if I find additional information.

Question: How about Beautyberry?

Answer: I clean and dry beautyberry seeds by crushing the berries (each will contain several small seeds) into a glass of water, stirring the mixture to help separate the seeds from the flesh. Ripe seeds will fall to the bottom and flesh should float to the top. Pour off the flesh and water; transfer the seeds to a plate to dry.

In the chat, someone mentioned that it's helpful to search for the plant name with the word propagation to find information about specific plants.

Question: How to you collect seeds from threadleaf coreopsis?

Answer: Collect the entire seed head and place in a small envelope or paper bag to dry. Gently manipulate the envelope once the seed head has dried to work the seeds loose. Or hold the seed head upside down and shake the seeds loose or separate with your fingers. I found this [video](#) for lanceleaf coreopsis which may be helpful.

Question: Is it ok to leave the chaff with tiny seeds?

Answer: It is ok to leave the chaff as long as the seeds are dry. Chaff can help to distribute the tiny seeds more evenly when sowing.

[Prairie Moon](#) provides pictures of seeds with a coin to judge the size and shape to make sure you are saving the actual seeds, but their seeds are actually prairie seeds.

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Question: Do you have a list of local ecotype seed sellers in Maryland and/or the mid-Atlantic region?

Answer: Some sellers were mentioned in the chat:

- *Wildside Nursery (Baltimore)
- Chesapeake Natives (Upper Marlboro)
- [Ernst Seeds](#) (Meadville, PA)

And some that I know of, or I've heard of through the Facebook group (Maryland Area Gardening for the Environmentally Conscious, MAGEC) but have not thoroughly researched:

- [Bona Terra](#) (Indian Head)
- [Goodman LLC](#) (Lusby)
- *[Ujamaa Seeds](#) (Accokeek) – sells some native tree/shrub seeds
- [Toadshade Wildflower Farm](#) (New Jersey)
- [Archewilde](#) (Quarkertown, PA) – references a [SeedSource software](#)
- *[Hungry Hook Farm](#) (Lancaster, PA)
- *[Hayefield](#) (Hayefield, PA) – “native somewhere in the US”
- *[North Carolina Botanical Garden](#) (Chapel Hill, NC)
- *[Everwilde Farms](#) (WI) – offers seeds by regions

*Entries with an * are not currently featured on the Maryland Native Plant Society website.

Note: Wild Ones national is starting to create lists of [nurseries by state](#).

Note: Some examples in the presentation are not native to our region (purple coneflower and beautyberry) but were used because of the availability and were a good example of the seed type.

Question: It's typically better to have a native plant, even if it's not a local ecotype. When collecting seeds from a garden, do you consider that after 6 generations, a plant no longer counts as a local ecotype, or does that not concern you? One of the benefits of local ecotypes is the genetic diversity, but when you go multiple generations, those plants have become adapted to your particular growing conditions, which removes some of the diversity than if you are collecting from multiple locations with different growing conditions.

Answer: I had heard about this through Jimmy Rogers, but I don't have any resources. Judy Fulton offered to see what she could find. Also, Amy Sawyer posed [the question in the Maryland Area Gardening for the Environmentally Conscious \(MAGEC\) Facebook group](#).

It was mentioned that the amount to collect is no more than 10% of seed from wild areas, with permission. It was also mentioned that one can collect without

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permission on the roadside right of ways. But be careful that the state or county has not planted the plants there; they would not be wild. Jeremy Tidd of Bona Terra may be able to fill in some of the blanks that we have today. And I will continue to research.

Question: For winter sowing, do you only use milk jugs?

Answer: Any plastic container that is transparent can be used. For more details, check out this winter sowing presentation that I did with a master gardener colleague. Some containers mentioned were from phô (about 5” deep), “to go” cups with lids, lettuce containers with dome tops.

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