



Scout for seeds now. They're good to grab if they're brown and yellow on the ground.

The fall is a great time to scout out pods or seeds that have turned brown or yellow but be sure to wait until the seed can drop on its own. Look around your own garden and other areas where plants grow wild, but be sure to get permission before entering any private land.



Know when to walk away

If you remove too many seeds from one area, you may inadvertently destroy a native plant colony. Always try to take no more than 10 per cent of the available seeds. If you see trampled grass or stripped seed heads, likely someone else has harvested already and you should move on.

Never collect seed from rare or at-risk species such as the small, white lady's slipper orchid (*Cypripedium candidum*) or the medicinally important goldenseal (*Hydrastis canadensis*).

Keep them high and dry

After collecting, lay out the seeds, pods or capsules in a dry, airy place. The pods should eventually crack open but if they don't, squeeze them gently and the contents should spill out. Flower heads can be gently shredded to separate the seeds. Clean off any remaining chaff to avoid any mold or diseases that will show up at germination time. Seeds should be kept dry. Moisture, heat, and fluctuating temperatures are a seed's worst enemy.

Paper bags or envelopes are great for storage until they are completely cleaned and dried. After that, use small jars you can label with the seed name/species, date and location collected. Store the jars in a dry, cool, dark location.

Consider donating a portion of your seed to the North American Native Plant Society Seed Exchange: www.nanps.org/index.php/activities/seed-exchange



Before you plant

Most seeds mature in the fall and are intended to germinate the following spring but you need to persuade a dormant seed that it has been through a winter. You can look-up the exact requirement for each species, but the most common is cold damp stratification. This involves moistening the seed and placing it in a cold environment for one or more months before planting.