



What is a Seed Swap?

A gathering of people, usually gardeners and farmers, who have come together to share seeds. These seeds can include locally saved seeds, excess bought seeds, seeds brought back from another region or country, or excess seeds that a seed company donated—you decide what you want to swap. Normally, seeds are spread on tables, and people choose what they want. Sometimes, seeds are saved with their seedstoshare information and monitor what is taken. There are many ways to organize a swap, but the main idea is to bring people together to share seed.



How to organize a seed swap

It's nothing new. We've been doing it for 10,000 years, coming together at markets, town squares, in huts and in halls to swap seeds and stories. But the seed swap is being rediscovered by a new generation of plant people, and their collective joy, excitement, and knowledge is really at the core of the community seed movement.

Seed swaps welcome

- experienced seed savers who want to connect, expand their collections, and improve their skills;
- new gardeners and seed savers who want to learn about crop diversity, regionally adapted varieties, seed politics, and the power that comes from developing local seed solutions.

Seed swaps also offer the opportunity to cultivate a network of people interested in ongoing seed projects and to collectively develop and share seed that supports a more diverse and resilient local food supply.



Plan a seed swap in
your community 

Organizing a Seed Swap

Seed swaps can be stand-alone events or part of other happenings — farmers markets, art festivals, flower shows, conferences for gardeners or Slow Food enthusiasts, or other educational events. Collaborating with organizers of another event may make it easier to start a new seed swap.

Whether you are organizing as part of another event, starting from scratch, or planning a seed swap for just your friends, consider these questions:

who

- How many people do you want to attend?
- Will the event be by invitation only or open to the public?
- Will your audience include seed savers of all levels of experience?
- How much help and what type of skills do you need from fellow organizers?

why

- Will your event include an educational program or talk about seed saving?
- Do you want attendees to stay connected after the event for future seed projects?
- Is the swap a fundraiser?

when

- Is this a one-off event or the beginning of a series of seed swaps or events?
- When is the best time for gardeners in your community to share seeds?

what

- What kind of seeds will be shared? Open-pollinated only? Local only? Organic only? Will commercial seed be allowed or only garden-saved?
- Will a plant swap, food potluck, or any type of presentation or performance be part of the event?



Planting the Seed — starting a seed swap in your community

One of your roles as an organizer is to find other enthusiastic people who can help plan the swap. For a large event open to the public, start organizing several months ahead of time. A smaller seed swap for people you know may require less planning. These steps will help you get started:

Enlist helpers:

Find people who will help organize and publicize the event or will help at the swap. Find other gardeners or community organizers with experience or resources that complement your own and who can help make decisions.

Groups to consider contacting for collaboration, volunteers, donations, or other support:

garden clubs, community organizations with similar goals like Slow Food or Transition Town, agriculture groups, churches, school gardens, master gardeners, community gardens, seed companies, nurseries.

(Optional) Include speakers or educators:

Will you distribute information about seed saving or host speakers? Enlist people who could speak about the history and value of seeds, techniques for planting or saving seeds, or how people can stay involved in saving seeds in their communities after the seed swap. If you have many first-time seed savers, try to have someone who can both inspire and educate (passion fertilizes new starts).

(Optional) Contact people who can *donate* money, supplies, or seeds, or who could *receive* money or seeds generated from the event:

If your swap will raise money or collect seeds for a local charity, businesses or other groups may choose to support your event. Contact potential supporters in advance in case they can help with planning and logistics (offering space, printing, food, seeds, or money toward other expenses). Food co-ops often can provide snacks or beverages and, occasionally, small amounts of money. If you're fundraising, remember to mention the charity that will benefit. And remember to always credit sponsoring businesses or organizations.



Putting Down Roots — creating the structure for your swap

How will you structure the event? Some questions to consider:

- Should participants arrive within a certain window of time to drop off their seeds before swapping begins, or can they arrive at any time during the event?
- Will organizers collect seeds as participants arrive and set them out on tables before swapping begins, or will participants be responsible for setting out their seeds?
- Will people who bring seeds be given the first chance to take seeds or be given any other priority over people who don't?

Set a date and time:

When would people in your community be most likely to attend? Gardeners generally have more time after harvest (late fall) but before planting begins (early spring) to participate and help organize. The months between December and February are the traditional times to purchase seed and are a fine time for a seed swap.

Find a location:

Choose a venue based on the size of the group you are expecting. Do you need to rent tables or do they come with the room? Make sure you have enough standing space and table space for people and seeds, as well as for a potluck or plant swap if either is planned (swaps can be chaotic if squeezed into too small a space). If you will be hosting demonstrations or speakers, choose a venue with seating and a staging area (with audiovisual equipment if necessary). Consider halls, lodges, schools, churches, and community centers; their leadership may be willing to host you for free.

Make sure there will be seeds throughout the event:



If this is the first seed swap in your community, chances are good that more people will show up to *take* seed than to bring seed. Unless you're certain that some experienced seed savers will bring excess seed, consider collecting an initial supply of seeds before the event. Seed companies and nurseries may be willing to donate seeds. To avoid running out of seed, limit the number of packs each person may fill, or allow people who bring seed to fill more packets than those who don't (this also will encourage folks to bring seed). Or post signs asking people to take only small amounts, and encourage people who bring seed to stay with it and monitor quantities.

Tell people how to attend and be involved:

Publicize your seed swap with flyers, emails, posts on social networks, announcements in local news outlets, and notices in community calendars. Remember that not all seed savers have access to computers, so use many methods to promote the event and encourage people to pass information on to others. Ask existing groups to announce the seed swap among their members. Include the following basics in your announcements (but don't overwhelm readers with too much text — visually enticing invitations work best):

Who, what, where, when, why. Include all the information to bring people to the right place at the right time and give them reasons why they shouldn't miss it (describe a seed swap for those who might be unfamiliar with them). Announce any special guests or speakers. Point out the chance to discover new seeds and friends in your community. If the swap is a benefit, mention the charity.

What types of seed will be welcome. Determine whether you want only locally saved seed, commercially grown seed, or hybrid or open-pollinated seed. Decide if people can swap tubers, plants, scionwood (cuttings from trees) as well.

Welcoming all seed may be easier, but feel free to encourage certain types. Decide how to deal with any invasive types — you may ask people to label potentially invasive plants ahead of time, or group those seeds on a separate table with a warning.

How seed should be labeled and packaged. Should seeds already be portioned in bags or envelopes, or will they be set out in bulk, or both? Clarify this ahead of time so that people come prepared. Seed should be labeled clearly and with as much information as possible including:



Common name and variety
Latin name (include family, genus, species)
The year the seeds were collected
Where the seeds were grown and who grew them
Any extra information you want to include about what makes the variety unique, or tips for growing.

Encourage people to bring photos of the plants, fruits, and vegetables that their seeds produce — like a seed catalog, photos often create excitement.

What else should participants bring?

Will you collect admission or donations (for charity or to cover the costs of the event)? Will you offer a discount to people who bring seeds? Should people bring food or other things to swap (recipes, clothes, books, tools)?



Sprouting — managing the day of the event

How to organize the swap:

It's best if you spread the seeds out on tables according to seed type. For a small swap, separate the seeds into vegetables, flowers, herbs, and miscellaneous. For a larger swap, you may choose to arrange by plant family (each table sign should include common names also), with hosts to help people place the seed in the appropriate area. If serious savers come with a lot of seed, you may want to give them their own table so they can stay with their seed and talk about it.

Use the event to start building a community around seed:

Consider bringing the group all together at some point to share why the event was organized, why seed matters, and visions for other seed work that could happen, and to hear people's ideas on what they want to contribute to community projects. If this is a fundraiser, discuss the charity that is benefiting and how it relates to the swap.

materials

Possible day-of-event checklist:

- Money box or jar for donations
- Envelopes, bags, and/or materials for creating seed packs
- Labels, pens, stamps, and permanent markers for labeling seed
- Spoons to get seed out of jars
- Sign-in sheets for people to get involved in future events
- Tables, tablecloths, chairs
- Presentation supplies (audiovisual equipment and everything for demonstrations)
- Printed agenda, educational materials, and information on how to be involved after the event
- Name tags for everyone, or just organizers who can answer questions. If you do both, give the organizers different-colored name tags so people with questions can find them. You might also give seed experts a name tag that says, "Ask me about seed."

signs

- Arrival** – sign-in and make donations
- Fundraiser** – who the swap benefits
- Organization** – how the seeds are organized
- Table signs** – if you are organizing seed type by table
- Labeling** – explaining how to label seeds
- Manners** – remind people to take only what they can use that year
- Gratitude** – thank sponsors
- Departure** – thanks for coming, another opportunity to donate and/or sign up for future events

helpers

- To set up the space before the event
- To collect money and contact information, and to direct people as they arrive
- To collect and/or organize seeds
- To clean up and organize seed throughout the event (seeds like to spill all over)
- To answer questions about seeds, give presentations, lead discussions about future events/projects, manage extra activities, or otherwise engage participants to clean up after the event and deal with leftover seed — usually experienced seed savers



Seed Savers
EXCHANGE

