

Planting For Seed Saving

by Kris Hart

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(BUZZ MAGAZINE) - As a Potager gardener (A potager is simply a vegetable plot that follows the principles of garden design to create an area that is not only ornamental but productive too. The main points to consider are rhythm, line, color, and texture, and it's important to introduce a focal point to bring the whole design together) I love saving my seeds at the end of the season for next season's garden.

I was intimidated at first because I wasn't familiar with each plant's life cycle. Since then, I have come to learn that if you cannot find where the seeds come from on a plant,

just wait. It will present its secrets to you in time. Every plant will produce a flower and then its seeds. Some plants take more time than others to do this. Onions, for example, will take multiple seasons to produce a flower.

I prefer heirloom varieties, although I am not strictly loyal only to heirlooms. I do opt for more heirlooms than hybrids only because their seeds will produce plants just like themselves, whereas hybrid seeds come from the selected cross-breeding to intentionally produce specific traits like larger or sweeter fruits. Because the parent plants of the seed are two very different varieties, if you save those seeds you will get a plant that is more like one of those two parents than the other and the fruit will be drastically different than the fruit you had last season. With heirloom varieties, you will get the same that you had last year.

One thing further is that if you wish to save your seeds and produce fruits next season that are identical to the fruits you harvested this season, you want to make sure your plants don't cross-pollinate with another variety of the same family.

This may sound confusing, but it really isn't. A basic rule of thumb to bear in mind when planting your garden plants is to give each variety that readily crosses, at least 10-15 feet of space between varieties. Some need more, some need less, but 10-15 feet is a good general measurement.

For example: If you are growing bush beans and pole beans, they may cross-pollinate if they are right next to each other. Although many seasoned gardeners find that they can plant several Blue Lake Bush Beans right next to several Rattlesnake Pole beans and see that they still produce true-to-type beans, your chances of a cross are much higher than if they had 15 feet of separation. So, what I like to do is plant a small group of 3-6 plants of one variety and then a small group of another type and then another group of a different type. For example, I have 6 Sweet Bell Peppers planted next to 6 Pineapple Ground Cherries next to a small cluster of herb plants next to a few Banana Peppers. So I do have at least 10' of separation between my sweet bell peppers and my banana peppers. I try to make the same precautions for all of my varieties except tomatoes. Tomatoes are a self-pollinating type of plant. Unintentional cross-breeding in tomatoes is possible, but not a huge concern.

I was super relieved to learn that watermelons and cantaloupe are different enough that they won't cross with each other, however different varieties of each will cross with each other.

I learned the hard way that Armenian White Cucumbers (which are actually a type of melon that taste like a cucumber) are close enough related to cantaloupes that they will cross! They ended up producing a cantaloupe-like plant with elongated webbed

cantaloupe fruits that tasted like a cantaloupe crossed with a cucumber. Strange and interesting as well as a great learning opportunity. I don't think we need to fear a cross in our garden. Its seeds will still produce food, it will just be a surprise kind of food.

I hope this information is helpful and you get out there and get your hands dirty! Please feel free to share your experience and tips on my Instagram or Facebook page @BottomViewFarmIL.

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