



Reddick Public Library District
Seed Library Growing Guide

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*Note: The information contained in this guide is a compilation of growing tips and directions from various seed providers and organizations.

RPLD Seed Library Procedure

The goal of the Reddick Public Library District (RPLD) Seed Library is to build connections and foster learning for our community by providing accessible resources that can be utilized in our area.

Seed library: The RPLD Seed Library is open from March to September. Seeds are available while supplies last. Any updates will be posted on the RPLD website.

Cost: There is no cost in borrowing seeds.

Membership: A current RPLD library card is not required. We do ask that you provide name and what seeds you borrow when checking out for statistical purposes at the end of the season.

Limits: The limit of borrowing seeds is five (5) seed packets per person per year.

Returns: While there is no requirement to return seeds to the RPLD Seed Library, we highly encourage all patrons who borrow seeds to make an effort to try to return seeds at the end of the growing season. Seed saving and returning seeds helps ensure that the Seed Library is able to continue and serve patrons each year. The growing guide contains information on seed saving. There is no penalty for unsuccessful seed saving.

Quality Control: To ensure the quality of the seeds in our library, we ask that inexperienced gardeners start by saving seeds from varieties that are more easily saved. This will include self-pollinating plants such as lettuce, tomatoes, peas, and beans. Some seeds are more difficult to save, requiring special growing conditions or spacing to maintain quality. Resources will be available to help determine seed saving difficulty of different plant varieties.

Donations: Donations are accepted year-round. We accept all seeds, but we will prioritize clean, mature, open-pollinated or heirloom seeds. These seeds will be used to restock our Seed Library. Seeds of unknown or questionable origin will not be accepted. When donating seeds, please drop them off at the Circulation Desk in labeled containers with the common name of the plant and when the seeds were harvested.

Seed Survey: We strongly encourage patrons using the Seed Library to fill out the Seed Survey. RPLD Seed Surveys are available online or in-person. Please return in-person surveys to a staff member.

Seed Library Seed Return or Donation Instructions

Please return or donate seeds in containers with any/all information possible. The minimum needed for seeds to be accepted is: **Common name and harvest date.**

If you know it, please include **variety and seed source.**

If the seed is from plants you grew, please include the original source of the plant and where these seeds were propagated (street or cross-street).

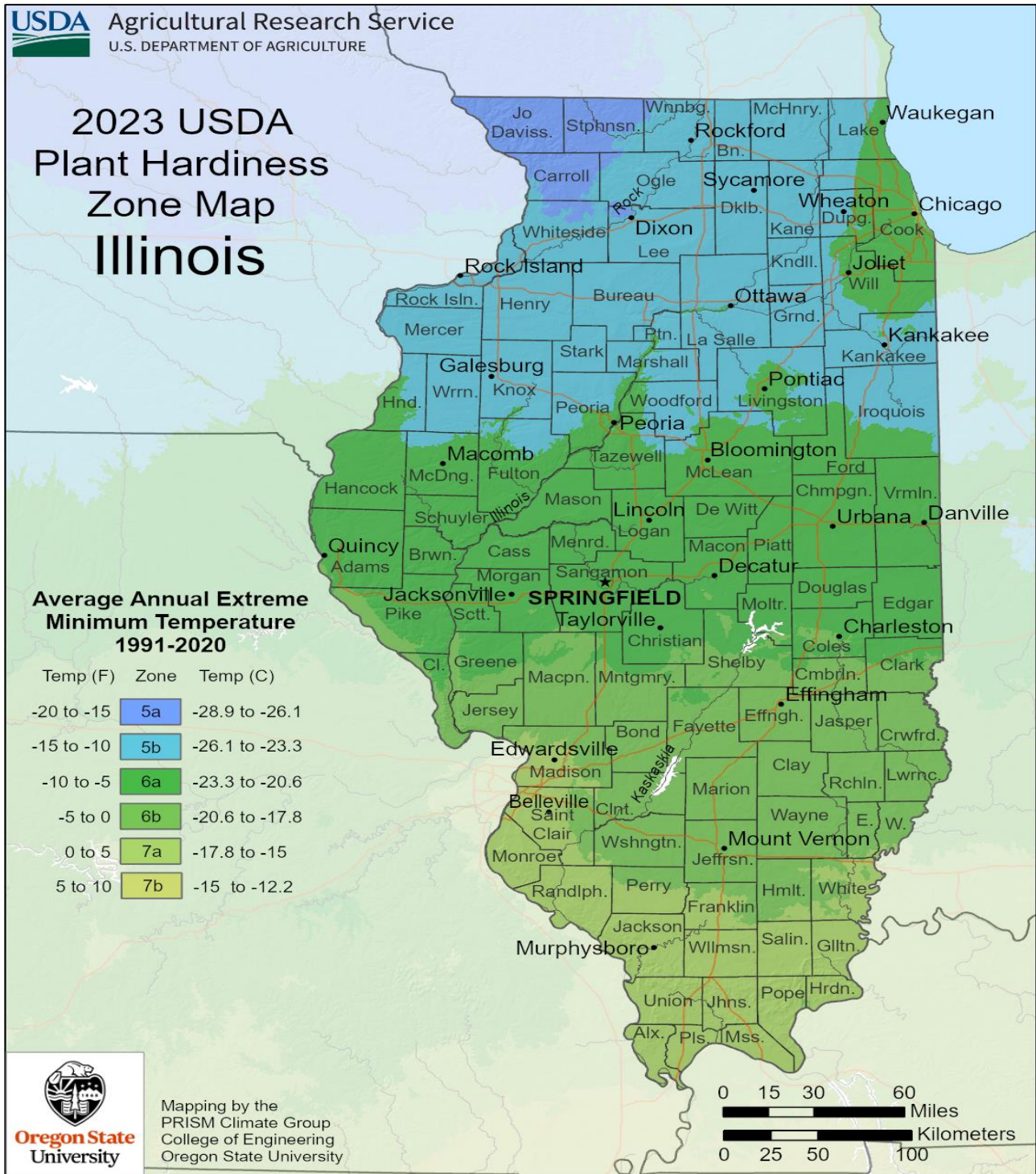
Include any special growing instructions or any additional notes about the seeds or plant you know.

Please give donations or returns to a staff member at the Circulation Desk.

We appreciate all returns and donations!

If you are interested in donating seeds in bulk, please contact us at webmaster@reddicklibrary.org or (815) 434-0509 to arrange a drop-off time.

2023 USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map: Illinois



Farmer's Almanac: Planting Calendar for Ottawa, IL

Spring Planting Calendar

Our spring planting calendar starts with the very first dates that you can plant (based on the last spring frost). But if you've missed these dates, no worries! This is why we've added "last planting dates" to our spring calendar; this is meant to help new gardeners understand that if they missed the first spring planting window, they could still get crops in the ground.

In fact, many crops with short maturity times (such as radishes) can be succession planted all the way through the summer in northern areas. However, note that some cool-season crops, such as kale and lettuce, do not grow well in hot temperatures, which can cause bolting issues. For some gardeners, especially in the South, a break to avoid summer heat is needed, but they can start once the heat has passed.

The dates provided are based on the number of weeks before or after frost, so we can provide a unique calendar to every user in the country. Thus, several crops (especially similar crops) may appear to have the same date. Kale and lettuce, for example, or dates for starting seeds, like broccoli and cabbage.

Fall Planting Calendar

When we say "fall," we really mean planting in summer in time for a fall harvest. Think of this as a second summer! It's easy to keep the crops going if you've already prepared the soil!

Many crops that would be started indoors for a spring crop can just be plunked into the soil directly for a fall crop. Not only is the soil already warm but also there are less pests and it tends to be rainier, so you don't need to water as often. Some fall vegetables need to be harvested by the first frost, but many are frost-tolerant and even taste better after a kiss of fall frost!

Specifically, on the charts, there are different columns labeled as follows:

1. **Start Seeds Indoors:** When to sow seeds indoors to get an early start on the season.
2. **Plant Seedlings Outdoors:** When to put small seedlings that you grew indoors (OR starter plants that you bought at a garden nursery) in the outdoor soil.
3. **Start Seeds Outdoors:** When to plant seeds directly into the outdoor soil.
4. **Last Date to Plant:** You may plant any time from the "start seeds" dates until this "last date." Don't wait any longer, or the crop won't have time to get to harvest before fall/winter frosts.

Planting Dates for Spring

*Based on Frost Dates

Crop	Start Seeds Indoors	Plant Seedlings or Transplants	Start Seeds Outdoors	Last Date to Plant
Anise Hyssop	FEB 28-MAR 15	APR 26-MAY 24	N/A	
Arugula	FEB 28-MAR 15	APR 5-APR 19	MAR 29-APR 5	SEP 19
Asparagus	N/A	APR 5-APR 12	N/A	APR 26
Basil	MAR 15-MAR 29	MAY 10-MAY 24	MAY 10-MAY 24	SEP 5
Beets	N/A	APR 26	MAR 29-APR 12	MAY 10
Bell Peppers	FEB 14-FEB 28	MAY 10-MAY 17	N/A	JUL 25
Bok Choy	MAR 15-MAY 29	MAY 10-MAY 17	MAY 10-MAY 17	JUN 7
Borage	MAR 15-MAY 29	MAY 3- MAY 10	MAY 3- MAY 10	
Broccoli	MAR 15-MAR 29	APR 12-APR 26	N/A	AUG 15
Brussel Sprouts	MAR 15-MAR 29	APR 12-APR 26	N/A	JUL 11
Cabbage	FEB 28-MAR 15	APR 5-APR 12	N/A	MAY 3
Cantaloupes	MAR 15-MAR 29	MAY 10-MAY 17	MAY 10-MAY 17	JUL 11
Carrots	N/A	N/A	MAR 29-APR 12	AUG 8
Cauliflower	MAR 15-MAR 29	APR 19-MAY 3	N/A	AUG 1
Celery	JAN 31-FEB 14	MAY 3-MAY 17	APR 26	AUG 8
Chamomile	FEB 28-MAR 15	MAY 3-MAY 10	MAY 3-MAY 17	
Chervil	N/A	N/A	APR 5-APR 12	
Chives	FEB 28-MAR 15	APR 5-APR 12	APR 5-APR 12	AUG 22
Cilantro (Coriander)	N/A	N/A	APR 26-MAY 10	MAY 17
Collards	FEB 28-MAR 15	MAR 29-APR 5	N/A	AUG 8
Cucumbers	APR 5-APR 12	MAY 3-MAY 17	MAY 10-MAY 17	AUG 8
Dill	N/A	N/A	APR 19-MAY 10	AUG 22
Dry Beans	N/A	N/A	MAY 10-MAY 17	JUL 11
Eggplants	FEB 28-MAR 15	MAY 10-MAY 17	N/A	AUG 8
Fava Beans	N/A	N/A	MAR 29-APR 5	MAY 10
Fennel	MAR 15-MAR 29	MAY 3-MAY 10	APR 26-MAY 10	AUG 1
Ginger	FEB 14-FEB 28	MAY 10-MAY 24	MAY 10-MAY 24	
Green Beans	N/A	N/A	MAY 3-MAY 24	
Honeydew Melon	APR 5-APR 12	MAY 10-MAY 17	MAY 10-MAY 17	JUL 18
Jalapeño Peppers	FEB 14-FEB 28	MAY 10-MAY 17	N/A	
Kale	FEB 28-MAR 15	APR 12-APR 26	MAR 29-APR 5	MAY 10
Kohlrabi	FEB 28-MAR 15	MAR 29-APR 12	N/A	MAY 10
Lavender	FEB 14-FEB 28	MAY 10-MAY 24	N/A	
Leeks	FEB 14-FEB 28	APR 5-APR 19	N/A	JUL 4

Lemon Balm	FEB 28-MAR 15	MAY 3-MAY 10	MAY 3-MAY 10	
Lemon Verbena	N/A	MAY 10-MAY 24	N/A	
Lettuce	FEB 28-MAR 15	MAR 29-APR 5	MAR 29-APR 5	MAY 10
Marjoram	FEB 28-MAR 15	MAY 3-MAY 10	N/A	
Mint	FEB 14-FEB 28	MAY 3-MAY 10	MAY 3-MAY 10	
Mustard Greens	MAR 15-MAR 29	APR 5-APR 12	APR 5-APR 12	
Okra	MAR 29-APR 12	MAY 10-MAY 17	MAY 10-MAY 24	AUG 8
Onions	FEB 14-FEB 28	MAR 29-APR 12	MAR 29-APR 12	JUL 11
Oregano	FEB 14-MAR 15	MAY 3-MAY 17	N/A	AUG 8
Parsley	FEB 14-FEB 28	MAY 3-MAY 17	MAR 29-MAY 3	AUG 1
Parsnips	N/A	N/A	MAR 29-APR 5	JUL 11
Peanuts	N/A	N/A	MAY 17-MAY 31	
Peas	N/A	N/A	MAR 29-APR 5	MAY 10
Potatoes	N/A	N/A	MAR 29-APR 12	AUG 8
Pumpkins	APR 5-APR 19	MAY 10-MAY 17	MAY 10-MAY 17	JUL 4
Radishes	N/A	N/A	MAR 29-APR 5	AUG 22
Rosemary	JAN 31-FEB 14	MAY 10-MAY 17	N/A	AUG 22
Sage	FEB 28-MAR 15	MAY 3-MAY 17	N/A	AUG 1
Salad Burnet	FEB 28-MAR 15	MAY 3-MAY 10	APR 26-MAY 24	
Salsify	N/A	N/A	MAR 29-APR 12	JUL 11
Savory	FEB 28-MAR 15	MAY 3-MAY 10	N/A	
Spinach	MAR 15-MAR 29	APR 5-APR 12	MAR 29-APR 5	MAY 10
Sweet Corn	N/A	N/A	MAY 10-MAY 24	AUG 1
Sweet Potatoes	N/A	MAY 17-MAY 24	N/A	JUL 4
Swiss Chard	MAR 15-MAR 29	APR 12-APR 26	APR 5-APR 26	MAY 10
Tarragon	FEB 28-MAR 15	MAY 3-MAY 10	N/A	
Thyme	FEB 14-FEB 28	MAY 3-MAY 10	N/A	JUL 25
Tomatillos	MAR 15-MAR 29	MAY 10-MAY 24	N/A	AUG 1
Tomatoes	FEB 28-MAR 15	MAY 10-MAY 17	N/A	JUL 18
Turmeric	FEB 28-MAR 29	MAY 10-MAY 24	MAY 10-MAY 24	
Turnips	N/A	N/A	MAR29-APR 5	SEP 19
Watermelon	APR 5-APR 19	MAY 10-MAY 17	MAY 3-MAY 10	JUL 18
Winter Squash	APR 5- APR 12	MAY 3-MAY 17	MAY 10-MAY 17	JUN 27
Zucchini (Summer Squash)	APR 5-APR 12	MAY 3-MAY 17	MAY 10-MAY 17	AUG 15

Planting Dates for Fall

*Based on Frost Dates

Seeds available through the RPLD Seed Library are highlighted

Crop	Start Seeds Outdoors	Transplant	Average Days to Maturity	Frost Tolerance
Arugula	AUG 29-OCT 3	N/A	40	FROST-HARDY
Beets	JUL 25-AUG 22	N/A	50	FROST-TOLERANT
Bok Choy	AUG 8-AUG 29	N/A	50	FROST-TOLERANT
Broccoli	JUL 18-JUL 25	AUG 8-AUG 22	60	FROST- TOLERANT
Brussel Sprouts	JUN 27-JUL 11	N/A	100	FROST- HARDY
Cabbage	N/A	JUL 25-AUG 8	90	FROST- TOLERANT
Carrots	AUG 1- AUG 8	N/A	70	FROST- TOLERANT
Cauliflower	JUL 11- JUL 18	JUL 25-AUG 1	75	TROST- TOLERANT
Chives	JUL 25-AUG 22	N/A	70	FROST- TOLERANT
Collards	JUL 11-JUL 25	AUG 22- SEP 5	75	FROST-HARDY
Fennel	JUL 18-AUG 1	N/A	80	TENDER
Garlic	OCT 31-NOV 13	N/A	120	FROST-HARDY
Green Beans	AUG 1-AUG 15	N/A	55	TENDER
Kale	AUG 8-AUG 22	N/A	60	FROST-HARDY
Kohlrabi	AUG 22-AUG 8 8	SEP 12-AUG 29	45	FROST-TOLERANT
Lettuce	AUG 22-SEP 5	N/A	60	FROST-TOLERANT
Mustard Greens	AUG 15-SEP 5	N/A	45	TENDER
Peas	AUG 8-AUG 22	N/A	55	TENDER
Radishes	SEP 5-SEP 15	N/A	25	FROST-TOLERANT
Spinach	AUG 29-SEP 19	N/A	30	FROST-HARDY
Swiss Chard	AUG 8- AUG 22	N/A	60	FROST-TOLERANT
Turnips	AUG 15-AUG 29	N/A	50	FROST-TOLERANT

Common Gardening Terms (from Creek Side Gardens)

ANNUALS- Varieties that complete their life cycle in one year or less, requiring sowing every year. Annual flower varieties often bloom profusely and over a long period of time.

BIENNIAL- Varieties, both flowers and vegetables, that complete their life cycle in two years, usually just showing only leaf growth the first year, and flowers the next.

BABY GREENS- Young, leafy vegetables or herbs that are harvested at 2"–4" tall.

BOLTING- The condition of premature flowering in edible crops, often making the plant unpalatable.

BURPLESS CUCUMBERS- Cucumbers that do not produce, or produce very little of a chemical called cucurbitacin, which produces a slight bitter flavor mainly concentrated in the skin and causes minor indigestion in some people.

COLD CLIMATES- Botanical Interests defines cold climates as those that experience freezing temperatures; generally, USDA zones 9 and cooler.

COLD FRAME- A four-sided frame placed on the ground or in a garden bed that has a clear top. By design, it increases temperatures over the ambient temperature and is used for growing seedlings for transplant or for food crops, extending the harvest season.

COMPANION PLANTING- Planting different plants together that benefit one another. For example, sowing a plant that attracts pollinators next to a plant that requires pollination.

COMPOST- Organic matter often made from decomposed/broken down plant material. Compost can be used to replenish soil nutrients and introduce soil biology to a growing area or simply to reduce landfill waste.

COVER CROP- Fast growing plants, usually grains, legumes, or grasses that are utilized for one or more of their soil-enhancing qualities. These crops are usually worked into the soil or removed before they produce seed.

CROP- A plant that is cultivated for harvest, like cutting flowers or vegetables.

CULTIVAR- A species that was selected or bred by humans for a particular feature. Cultivars carry a specific name in addition to the scientific name and/or common name, e.g. 'Brandywine'.

DAYS TO EMERGE- Number of days, on average, that it will take a seedling to emerge from the soil or medium in favorable conditions.

DAYS TO MATURITY/HARVEST- Number of days from sowing (or transplant) to harvest, When plant is ready for picking or in bloom.

DEADHEADING- Cutting spent flowers off a plant, encouraging the plant to bloom again; extending the bloom period.

DETERMINATE- Describes tomatoes that stop growing when fruit begins forming from the topmost flower bud, making them more compact at around 3'–4'. Most of the crop ripens within a couple weeks time, making these a great choice for canning.

DIRECT SOW- Sow seeds directly in their permanent growing space.

DISEASE RESISTANCE- Exhibiting less susceptibility or an immunity against specific diseases as compared to other varieties.

DISEASE TOLERANCE- Better ability to thrive with the stress of infection as compared to other varieties.

DROUGHT TOLERANT- Ability to survive or thrive in low water conditions. Also known as "water-wise."

ETIOLATION- Characterized by lanky, weak, pale plant growth, resulting from low or no-light conditions.

FAIRLY DROUGHT TOLERANT- Ability to survive or thrive in low water conditions, but to a lesser extent than "drought tolerant" plants.

FIRST/LAST FROST DATE- A frost date is the average date of the first or last light freeze that occurs in spring or fall.

FROST TOLERANT CROPS- Crops that tolerate some cool weather and even frost, although the amount of tolerance varies between crops and even varieties.

FROST SENSITIVE CROPS- Crops that are not frost tolerant and will die as a result of exposure to freezing temperatures.

FRUIT- A seed capsule that emerges from a flower, such as a tomato or melon.

FULL SUN- Six or more hours of sunlight.

GERMINATION- The moment when a seed begins to grow.

GMO- Stands for Genetically Modified Organism. Commonly means genetically engineered, indicating that the variety was manipulated at the gene level in a laboratory.

GYNOECIOUS- A plant with only pollen-accepting flowers. A pollinator plant with pollen-producing flowers is required for fruit production. These varieties are generally very productive and fast to mature.

GROWING SEASON- The part of the year during which rainfall and temperature allow plants to grow.

HARDENING OFF- The 7 to 10-day process of acclimating plants started indoors to outdoor conditions.

HARDINESS- The degree to which a plant can withstand cold temperatures. Botanical Interests uses "hardiness" to also indicate the lifespan of a plant, e.g. annual, biennial, or perennial.

HEAT TOLERANCE- The ability to resist heat-triggered issues like poor pollination, bitterness, premature flowering, and lack of fruit-set.

HEIRLOOM- Botanical Interests considers open-pollinated varieties over 50 years old to be heirloom.

HYBRID- Modern F1 (filial 1) type hybrid. Two specific parent varieties are bred to achieve a first generation hybrid offspring. F1 hybrids are not open-pollinated. Traditionally, "hybrid" indicates any variety that had been made by cross-pollinating, even if that was completed by hand or an insect.

INDETERMINATE- Describes tomato varieties that continue to grow and produce tomatoes all season until first frost: therefore, you can find tomatoes at all stages on the plant at one time. Also called "pole" tomatoes because supports are helpful in guiding plants that can easily reach 6' or more.

LATIN NAME/SCIENTIFIC NAME- The two or more part names that are unique to a specific species. Scientific names are consistent in any language, whereas a species may have several common names that may even vary by region.

MEDIUM- For horticultural purposes, a medium is the material plants grow in.

MICROGREEN- Young, leafy vegetables or herbs that are harvested just above the soil line when the plants have their first pair of leaves, called cotyledons, and possibly the just-developing true leaves.

MILD CLIMATES- Botanical Interests defines mild climates as those without freezing temperatures; generally, USDA zones 10 and warmer. By using microclimates and protections some cooler USDA zones can also use mild climate sowing instructions.

MONOECIOUS- The attribute of a plant producing both pollen-producing and pollen-receiving parts.

NATIVE- Botanical Interests identifies varieties that are native to the U.S. as "native".

ORGANIC SEED- Describes seeds grown on certified organic property, following strict USDA guidelines regarding soil quality, pest and weed control, and the use of additives like fertilizers.

OPEN POLLINATED- Varieties that produce seeds that are "true", growing into nearly identical plants as the plant they were harvested from (if they are not cross pollinated). Unless a Botanical Interest variety is identified as a hybrid, it is open pollinated.

PARTIAL SUN/PARTIAL SHADE

3 to 6 hours of sunlight.

PARTHENOCARPIC- The attribute of a variety producing fruit without fertilization. Cultivars produce seedless fruits when flowers are unpollinated, making them ideal for greenhouse production where pollinators may be excluded. When pollinated, these types produce seeded fruit.

PERENNIALS- Varieties that live for two or more years.

PHOTOPERIODISM/DAY LENGTH RESPONSE- Refers to a reaction some organisms have to the length of day or night. In plants this reaction is usually flowering.

POLLINATION- The fertilization of a flower by wind, insect, birds, etc. where the male pollen reaches the female stigma, resulting in a seed, sometimes surrounded by an edible fruit like a pepper.

POLLINATOR- An organism that transfers pollen.

ROW COVERS- Fabric that is used to either exclude pests or raise temperatures of the area beneath it. "Remay" is a type of poly-spun row cover material commonly used in farm and garden settings and it comes in several different thicknesses. Row covers may or may not have hoops under it to create a "low tunnel".

SCARIFICATION- The process of breaking through a hard outer covering of a seed to allow moisture to penetrate.

SELF-SOW- To drop viable seeds to the ground. In some varieties, often annuals, if seeds are allowed to drop, those seeds will germinate, perpetuating the variety. The subsequent seedlings are often referred to as "volunteers".

SEMI-DETERMINATE- Growth type of tomatoes that falls between determinate and indeterminate types. They produce a main crop that ripens within a couple weeks, but also continue to produce up until frost.

SOW- To plant the seeds of a plant or crop.

SPROUT- Germinated seeds that are not grown in medium but instead rinsed in water and drained several times a day.

STRATIFICATION- The process of subjecting seed to a moist and cold treatment to break dormancy, which occurs naturally when seed is sown outdoors in the fall and experiences a winter period.

SUCCESSIVE SOWING- Sowing at least once more after the initial sowing, which extends the harvest. Three ways to successive sow: 1. Staggering sowings of the same crop 2. Sowing two varieties of the same crop with different maturing dates 3. Replacing one finished crop with a different crop.

TENDER PERENNIAL- A perennial that is not cold hardy in all zones. For Botanical Interests purposes, perennials hardy in only USDA zones 7 and higher are called tender perennials.

THINNING- The act of reducing extra seedlings so that remaining plants are spaced properly.

TRANSPLANTING- Transferring a plant to a different growing space.

UNTREATED SEED- Seed that does not have a chemical treatment such as fungicide applied to it.

USDA HARDINESS ZONE- The historical, average, lowest winter temperature in specific geographic US areas. Perennials are rated using the USDA zone system, indicating the coldest temperature and USDA zone in which they can survive.

VARIETY- A species that has naturally formed a unique characteristic, for example from cabbage (*Brassica oleracea*) came kale (*Brassica oleracea* var. *viridis*) and kohlrabi (*Brassica oleracea* var. *gongylodes*) which both adapted unique characteristics that differ from cabbage and so the variety ("var.") name was added to the species name.

VERNALIZATION- A cold treatment, such as found in cold winter conditions, that induces flowering in some varieties.

VOLUNTEER- A plant that emerges from being self-sown or sown by an animal rather than by the gardener.

Seed Viability and Germination

Over time, seeds lose the ability to grow. “Seed germination rate” refers to the ability of the seed to sprout. “Seed viability” refers to the strength and vigor of the plant after germination. Seed viability will begin to decline before seed germination rates fall; therefore, if you have a packet of seeds and very few of the seeds germinate, the seeds that do germinate are not likely to grow strong healthy plants.

HOW TO PROPERLY STORE SEEDS

Seeds need to be kept dry and cool. The most important factors in seed storage are seed moisture and storage temperature. The drier the seeds at time of storage, the longer they can be stored. Store in low humidity and low temperature, below 45 ° F (15 °C). Storing in a sealed container, such as a jar or bag, in a refrigerator is recommended. If you do not have room in a refrigerator, just keep the seeds cool and dry. If the seeds are exposed to too much moisture and warm temperatures, they will begin to sprout. Once the seed has sprouted, it needs sunlight and nutrients to continue growing. If the seeds sprout while in storage, they will not grow the next year when planted. When removing the seeds from the refrigerator or cool storage location, allow them to come to room temperature before opening.

HOW TO TEST SEED GERMINATION

Place 10 seeds on a damp paper towel. Fold the paper towel and place it in a plastic bag or reusable container. This will prevent the paper towel from drying out. Label the container with the plant name, date, and number of days expected for germination (info from seed packet). Leave the container in a warm place and observe for seed germination. Sunlight is not needed. After the expected number of days for germination, count the number of seeds which have begun to grow. If all 10 seeds grow, plant as normal. If seven to nine seeds grow, increase the number of seeds you plant. If six or fewer seeds germinate, it is best to buy new seeds.

APPROXIMATE SEED LIFE

Asparagus	3 years
Bean.....	3 years
Beet	4 years
Broccoli.....	3 years
Brussels sprouts	4 years
Cabbage	4 years
Carrot	3 years
Cauliflower.....	4 years

Celery.....	3 years
Chard, Swiss.....	4 years
Chinese cabbage	3 years
Collards	5 years
Corn, sweet.....	2 years
Cucumber	5 years
Eggplant	4 years
Endive.....	5 years
Fennel.....	4 years
Kale	4 years
Kohlrabi.....	3 years
Leek	2 years
Lettuce.....	6 years
Muskmelon.....	5 years
Mustard.....	4 years
Okra	2 years
Onion.....	1 year
Parsley.....	1 year
Parsnip	1 year
Pea	3 years
Pepper	2 years
Pumpkin.....	4 years
Radish.....	5 years
Rutabaga.....	4 years
Spinach.....	3 years
Squash.....	4 years
Tomato	4 years
Turnip	4 years
Watermelon.....	4 years

Seed Saving (University of Illinois Extension)

What plant seeds should be saved?

When you are selecting plants to save seeds from, choose open-pollinated varieties which have the most stable traits.

Easy plants to save seeds from

These annual, self-pollinating crops don't require isolation, and you only need a few plants to get good seed: Peas, beans, lettuce, tomatoes.

Isolation

There is a common misconception that plants in the same family can cross pollinate, such as cucumbers, squash, or watermelon which are all in the Cucurbitaceae family. This is false. Different species won't cross pollinate. But different varieties of the same species can cross pollinate, such as between summer squash and pumpkins. These plants are different varieties of the same species and need to be isolated from each other if you are saving seeds.

Why do you isolate varieties?

Gardeners isolate plants because they want to save seeds and prevent unwanted cross pollination. The fruits from plants that have not been isolated will be the same, but the seeds grown from that plant would be different. Isolating varieties keeps them true to type.

How do you isolate varieties?

There are three main ways to isolate varieties: time, containment, and distance.

Time: Stagger the planting times of varieties so they do not flower at the same time.

Containment: A physical barrier can isolate plants. Use a paper bag, floating row covers, or nylon bags to cover wind-pollinated flowers. These bags also work well for insect-pollinated plants. Barriers can be done on individual flowers or a whole plant. Hand pollination ensures the flower is pollinated by the correct plant. Use a cotton swapped stick or a small paint brush to gently brush against the flower's stamen to pick up some pollen. Then, gently brush the female stigma to transfer the pollen. You can also take the male stamen and directly and gently rub it onto the female stigma.

Distance: There are a few general rules for distance isolation, but each variety has specific needs. Refer to the below chart from Seed Savers Exchange for recommended isolation distances for some commonly grown produce species. More species guidelines are available at www.seedsavers.org. In general, self-pollinators, such as tomatoes, need to be a few rows apart. Primarily self-pollinator plants such as oats should be 5 to 10 feet

apart. Insect pollinated plants such as beans, barley, or broccoli should be 200 yards apart. Wind-pollinated plants such as beets, chard, spinach and corn should be a mile apart. If that separation distance isn't possible, consider another isolation method.

Harvesting seeds

Don't forget to grow enough plants if you are going to be harvesting some for food.

Dry Harvesting

- Plants: Beans, peas, onion, carrot, corn, flowers, herbs.
- Seed type: Mature, dry seeds.
- Harvest: Cut off seed heads just before they are fully dry to prevent seed loss for small, light, airy seeds.
- Process: Dry further on a screen in a single layer in a cool, well-ventilated location. You can also dry seed heads in paper bags to prevent loss or cover seed heads directly on plant with nylon bag to catch seeds.

Wet Harvesting

- Plants: Fleshy fruits with gel casing around seeds.
- Harvest: Scoop seeds out or crush fruit to release seeds.
- Process: Put seeds in a jar with a small amount of water to ferment for two to four days, stir daily.

Fermentation helps to break down gel coating on seeds. Viable seeds will sink. Pulp and bad seed float. Pour off the top layer and water. Spread the seed on paper towel or fine screen to dry before storage.

Storing seeds

Keep seeds cool and dry using paper envelopes. A paper bag in a glass jar, which is pest proof, works for long term storage. Label the container with the plant name, variety, and date.