

# Seed Library



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- ▶ Melissa Armstrong
- ▶ Assistant Director
- ▶ 2011
- ▶ Go to person- scheduling, periodicals, home delivery, payroll, seeds, garden, outreach, problem solving, book mobile, and intellectual freedom fighter.

# What is a Seed Library?

- ▶ A place where people in your community go to check out and swap open pollinated and heirloom seeds.
- ▶ Usually provide information on how to properly save seeds, grow your own food, and become more self sufficient.
- ▶ Our Seed Library only carries heirloom and open pollinated seeds. Which means if saved properly they will grow to be just like their parent plant.

# Why Seed Libraries?



# Objectives

- ▶ Learn why seed libraries are so important
- ▶ Find out how easy it is to start a seed library
- ▶ Learn how to grow your seed program to engage your community

# Will Your Seed Library have a Mission Statement or Focus?

- ▶ Encourage experimentation with new varieties or plants
- ▶ Create community/encourage collaboration
- ▶ Preserve local heritage/participate in history
- ▶ Educate your patrons about food

- Sharing seeds brings people into the library!
- Form of Outreach
- Many people interested in gardening
- By sharing and saving seeds we become stewards of seeds.
- Helps with biodiversity and extinction for different varieties. Helps the environment
- Improve flavors and varieties. Many seed varieties have been lost through the ages but Seed Libraries are helping preserve those varieties and others

# How do Seed Libraries help the Public?

- Free
- Saves money on groceries
- Self reliance
- Start growing your own food

# Make Sure We Are Speaking the Same language?

- ▶ Open pollinated varieties are those seeds , which if properly isolated from other varieties in the same plant species, they will produce seed that is genetically true to type. The new seed will be very much like the parent plant.
- ▶ Heirloom seeds are open pollinated but are also at least 50 years old and usually have a story. They predate open pollinated varieties. My Grandma saved seeds and had heirloom varieties
- ▶ We do not carry F1 seeds or GMO seeds. These seeds if saved will not be like the parent plant. Many of seed that you get at Walmart, grocery stores are not open pollinated.

# Phaseolus Vulgaris



# Diversity



# Diversity is important!

**90% of the world's food  
produced by only 30 plants!**

**4 of these plants provide  
75% of ALL calories consumed!**

- **Corn**
- **Soy**
- **Wheat**
- **Rice**

# What is Biodiversity?

Biodiversity is essential for the processes that support all life on Earth, including humans. Without a wide range of animals, plants and microorganisms, we cannot have the healthy ecosystems that we rely on to provide us with the air we breathe and the food we eat. So Seed Libraries help the environment.

# Preserve Genetic Diversity

So many great varieties will never see the fame of commercial seed catalogs. Some varieties only exist in the hands of 1 or 2 gardeners. Lend a hand and save some of those seeds that are in danger of disappearing

# Thorburn's Terra-Cotta Tomato





## Many Heirloom seeds have a history or a story

King Tut Purple Pea

January  
15, 2026

17

# Library = Library



- ▶ We started the Seed Library in 2012
- ▶ Webinar put out by Pima County Library and Seed Savers Exchange.
- ▶ Our first donation was from Pima County Library and Seed Savers Exchange
- ▶ Total start up was about 30 bucks for donation, labels, and packets.
- ▶ It has gotten more expensive over the years but if you start out little its very cheap.
- ▶ Labels, Coin Envelopes, and seeds.

# Planning & Assessment

- ▶ Seed Libraries are not one size fits all. Each one is unique and is based on the time and resources that your library has.
- ▶ Look for local initiatives that may be able to collaborate with you:
  - ▶ Garden clubs, community gardens, schools, MSU Ext
- ▶ Can you use volunteers to help with any setup?
- ▶ Start small and grow over time

# Lending Considerations

- ▶ Who can check out and how (affects how/if statistics are gathered)
  - We have little sheets they fill out and return to front desk
  - Some libraries have them check out seeds.
- ▶ Limit the number of seed varieties or packets per person/family? We say 10 packs per visit
- ▶ Will you require seeds only be taken if the patron can return?
  - We encourage best practices/request only, not require
  - Weather happens
  - Some seeds very hard to pollinate and save correctly
- Lending rules vary from library to library - do what works best for you!



At the end of the season we suggest that our patrons try to save an easy seed like beans, peas, or lettuce if they have no seed saving experience.

# Where do the seeds come from?

- ▶ Join the Community Seed Network through Seed Savers Exchange
  - ▶ Receive a copy of “The Seed Garden”, blossom bags, seed screen, about 20 varieties of seeds.
- ▶ Request donations from Heirloom seed companies
  - Baker Creek Seeds, SSE, Hudson Valley Seed Library
- ▶ Ask your patrons! Be specific for what you want – no hybrids, please.
  - ▶ We created a donation form for patrons to use

# Repackage your seeds!

- ▶ Each packet of seeds that you receive can be broken down into several more.
- ▶ Have a seed stuffing party!
  - ▶ Plan this before March
  - ▶ Have your materials all ready
    - ▶ Paper envelopes or plastic ziplock bags
    - ▶ Printed or handwritten labels?
- ▶ Organize your seeds
  - ▶ Alphabetical
  - ▶ By family/variety
  - ▶ By seed saving ease



Just an example

# Network Connections

- ▶ So many networking connections within the community. These are just a few.
- ▶ MSU Extension
  - ▶ Canning and freezing course
  - ▶ Gardening, seed saving and putting your garden to bed for winter
- ▶ Small farms
- ▶ Master gardeners
- ▶ Greenhouses

## Our Mission

The Seed Lending Library's mission is to promote a community that values gardening and seed saving through free heirloom and open pollinated seeds, we hope to help support gardeners and seed savers from beginner to expert, through the process of growing, harvesting, seed saving, and seed sharing.

## About Us

We started passing out seeds in 2012 and our program has grown each year. Our goal is to encourage the community to save seeds and prove that seed saving is a vital life skill. We want to bring the community together and show patrons how to grow some of their own food, reduce food cost, return flavor back into food, help the environment, create a sense of self reliance, and pass along seeds from early generations.

## Evolution of Our Seed Library

- Started in 2012
- Growing ever since
- Started the Home Grown Food Series: Gardening Classes, Canning Classes, Composting, Bee Keeping, Cooking, and etc
- Network connections allowed for donations like Square Foot Garden
- We Started a Garden in the back yard
- We now have 5 square foot gardens
- Friends of the Library bought us things like a small fence, dirt, a canning
- Tuscola Community Foundation Grant



## Jim Will from Will's Greenhouse

He was one of my biggest supporter, fan and mentor. He does a program for us every year and also donates something to the library every year. This year it was a Square Foot Garden

# Getting Ready for our donated Square Foot Garden



January  
10, 2020

Laying down a weed barrier



This happened during our SFG program!





January  
15, 2026

# Other Considerations

- ▶ Learn about seed saving and cross pollination
- ▶ So much online for quick knowledge
- ▶ Ben Cohen is a wonderful resource. Great speaker, presenter who has written about seed saving and many other things related to seeds. He owns Small House Farms in Sanford and has a huge seed swap coming up in next weekend
- ▶ <https://www.facebook.com/MISeedLibrary>
- ▶ One Seed, One State Initiative
- ▶ 135 Seed Libraries in Michigan



# Resources For Seeds

- ▶ [www.communityseednetwork.org](http://www.communityseednetwork.org)
- ▶ [www.highmowingseeds.com](http://www.highmowingseeds.com)
- ▶ [www.seedsnow.com](http://www.seedsnow.com)
- ▶ [www.anniesheirloomseeds.com](http://www.anniesheirloomseeds.com)
- ▶ [www.rareseeds.com](http://www.rareseeds.com)
- ▶ [www.seedlibrary.org](http://www.seedlibrary.org)
- ▶ [www.miseedlibrary.org](http://www.miseedlibrary.org)
- ▶ [www.seedsavers.org](http://www.seedsavers.org)
- ▶ [www.smallhousefarms.com](http://www.smallhousefarms.com)

# Questions?

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