

SEVEN BENDS AND FRIENDS



OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF SEVEN BENDS NURSERY



Letter from Iara

Dear Flora Friends,

Our native flora have lost their fall color, dropped their leaves, and are well on their way to entering fall dormancy. However, even in these cool, short days of fall and winter, several native species reveal a more subtle display of beauty through puffy seed heads and dangling berries. The seeds and fruits of native grasses, flowers, trees, and shrubs serve as essential food sources for our native wildlife, and offer the resourceful gardener an opportunity to expand on their garden and even potentially contribute to conservation efforts!

In this newsletter, you will find some basic instructions on how to collect, store, and germinate locally collected native seeds. Before embarking on the exciting journey of seed collection, we urge you to make sure you have the correct ID on species, the appropriate permissions, and are following protocols that protect our local populations.

Finally, if you have a property that hosts local populations of native plants, and are interested in sharing with us, please reach out to us! The more locally sourced species we can grow, the bigger the conservation impact we can have on our local ecosystems.

Thank you for all your support throughout the years. We cannot wait to see what we can do together in 2024!

Have a great winter and Happiest of Holidays from all of us at Seven Bends Nursery,

Dr. Iara Lacher



[Website](#)



[Webstore](#)



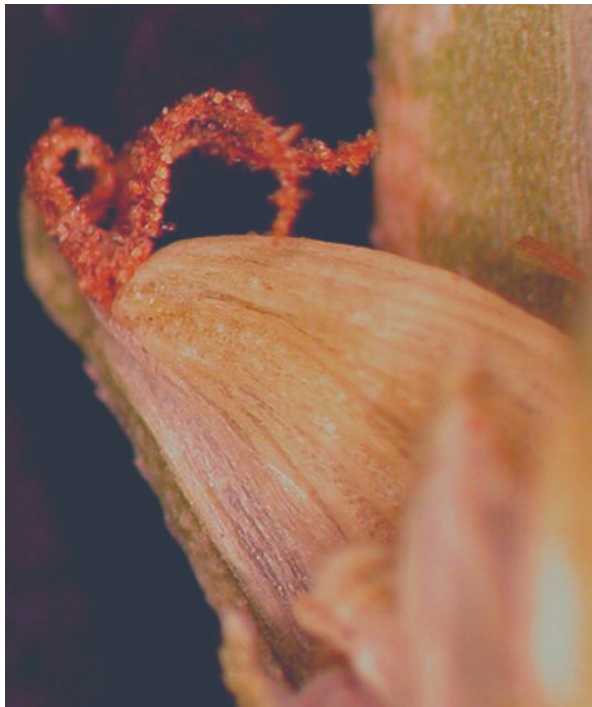
[Fairs](#)



'Tis the Seed Season

COLLECTING NATIVE SEEDS

While vibrantly colored leaves turn crisp and brown to beckon in the winter weather, gardeners like us may already feel the cabin fever settling in. You may be wondering what garden activities you can take part in instead of longingly watching your dormant garden from the window. Luckily for you, we have a fun activity you can take part in even on the coldest of days! Seed collecting and saving is a common activity that gardeners can partake in during the cooler months. Collecting native seeds has many benefits as it offers a low-cost option for building your garden, and even more importantly is an essential activity for the conservation of native species. Seed collection is as simple as finding native plants with viable seeds that you have permission to collect and can be sustainably collected from. All you need to start are some recycled containers or plastic bags and some permanent markers. Read on to find out how with the right knowledge you can take those collected seeds and turn them into plants. We promise it isn't magic but it sure does feel like it!



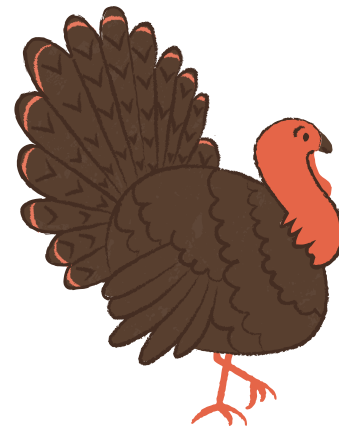
Announcements

Where to donate collected seed:

- [Virginia Department of Forestry](#)

Important Dates:

The Seven Bends Nursery Webstore is officially closed for the season. Our webstore will reopen April 1, 2024. To stay up to date on what we are working on for next year during the off season follow us on facebook and Instagram!





Seed collection is an important part of plant conservation as it preserves genetic diversity. Genetic diversity refers to the total number of different genetic characteristics found in the genetic pool for a single species. When a population is described as being “genetically diverse” it means the species as a whole has many variations in their genetic pool. Preservation of genetic diversity in our native plants is important to the larger picture of plant conservation as genetic diversity may increase the ability of a species to adapt to changing conditions. A plant species with a larger genetic pool has the flexibility to adapt to resist disease, overcome the impacts of climate change, and provide resources for wildlife. It is important to note that the genetic makeup of each plant species differs from area to area. So, when you collect seed from a location local to you, you are preserving that population’s unique genetic diversity. This all means you can actively participate in plant conservation just by collecting and growing local seeds!

There are quite a few options for what you can do with your seeds after collection. What you decide to do with them is based on your goals as a gardener!

1. **Directly sow seeds outside:** To directly sow your seeds you can take your collected seeds and directly plant them in the ground or broadcast them over the desired area before covering them with leaves. Leaves help keep seeds from flying away in the wind. This method mimics the natural “planting” of a seed where the seed leaves the parent plant and grows where it has landed. It is the best option if you don't have the space or energy to store seeds somewhere safe such as in your house.
2. **Save seeds until spring:** This option allows you time to find the ideal place to plant. However, it requires a little more planning for successful germination (see below).
3. **Donate:** If you don't want to keep seeds to grow for yourself but would like to help conserve plants in your area you can donate your seeds to a local seed bank where they will properly store seeds for future plantings. Check your local area for seed-collecting initiatives that are accepting donations and a list of which species they need.





When to collect:

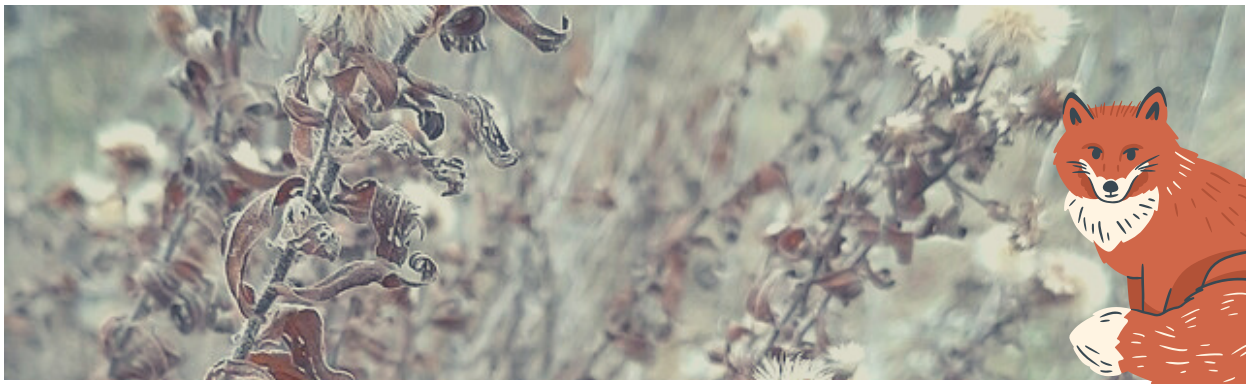
Seed collecting can be an all-year endeavor as different species mature at different times of the year. However, many of our native species set seed in late summer or fall making now a popular time for seed collectors! As with all living things, plants will follow their own timeline, so do not depend on the calendar alone in timing when seed is ready for collection. There are a couple of visual cues to guesstimate viability - look for seed pods that have turned slightly brown, and open without force. Viable seeds are often dry, firm, and brown or tan in color.

How to collect responsibly:

Responsibly collecting seeds refers to the legal and sustainable collection of seeds. It is illegal to collect seeds from protected areas including national parks and forests as well as on someone else's private property without permission. If you are unsure if seed collection is allowed and is either owned publicly or privately, reach out to those who manage the property to get consent. You may even need a permit depending on the property. Once you have established where you can responsibly collect seed and have located plants with viable seed it is time to start sustainably collecting!

To sustainably collect seed there are a few guidelines you want to follow. First, you only want to harvest seeds from one plant for every twenty plants of the same population. Second, for each plant you collect from you want to take no more than 10% of its seeds. When collecting seeds only harvest as much as you will use in your garden. Also, it is important to remember that we are collecting SEEDS of plants, not plants. With that being said don't pull any plants out by the root. Collecting too many seeds will harm the natural population you are collecting from and we all want to be plant friends, not plant foes!





How to store collected seeds:

After running around outdoors collecting your seeds it is time to store them! You want to ensure proper storage of your seeds to preserve their viability for when it comes time for planting. Storage needs differ depending on the species. Some seeds should be stored in dry, paper envelopes. Others need to be kept clean and moist. It is important to do your research on storage requirements prior to collection so you are prepared. This is a great opportunity to repurpose containers; medicine bottles, old Tupperware, and condiment jars all make great storage containers. Don't forget to label your containers with the plant's name, collection date, and location of the parent plant. Generally, the shelf life of seeds is said to be around 2-3 years before viability has decreased substantially. To get the best results we recommend that you plant your seeds the next growing season.

Breaking dormancy of seeds:

Many of our native plants require a period of "stratification" that mimics the natural event of overwintering to break dormancy. Dormancy is an adaptation that plants have evolved to prevent seeds from germinating during unsuitable ecological conditions that would result in low seedling survival. For example, dormancy prevents seeds from germinating during cold winter months when seedlings have little to no chance of survival. For many native plants, stratification can be done artificially by placing seeds in a moistened container in a cool location. Some seeds even require a double dormancy meaning they take two years of cold and warm cycles to be able to break their dormancy. Other seeds require physical modifications to break dormancy such as scarification, nicking, soaking, or boiling. The amount of light may also be important for germination, with some species requiring light to break dormancy and should therefore be sown on the soil surface.





That's it!

Phew, that's a lot of information but before you get too overwhelmed remember that gardening is a craft that requires experience to perfect. Trial and error is part of the game when it comes to successfully growing your own plants from seed. Although quite a bit of work goes into the process of collecting and storing seeds the work is made easier by knowing that both you and native plants are benefitting from your sustainable seed collection! Just remember to follow the sustainable seed collection guidelines outlined above as well as the laws on seed collection for each site you visit to ensure that both you and the plants you collect from are benefitting. Whether you are collecting to create a beautiful garden with low-cost plants or you are collecting seeds to donate to local seed banks you are helping with the conservation of our native plants. Collecting seeds is also a great way to spend time outside during the winter months! Take this time to learn about our native plants in the seed phase and what it takes for them to break dormancy and grow into plants! Let's soak up the wonder of our native plants by participating in the practice of native seed collection this fall and winter.

Happy native seed-collecting season from Seven Bends Nursery!

