

SAVING GARDEN SEED PACKAGES



Linda Estep
Master Gardener

Question: I purchased too many seed packets for my most recent garden and am wondering if they will still be good next year?

Answer: It is so easy to end up with extra seed packets. Sometimes we are so enthusiastic about planting that we buy too many seeds, and sometimes the busyness of life just gets in the way of our best intentions. The end result is we are left with seed packets that we did not completely use or sometimes, even open.

So what to do?

There is not a simple yes or no answer to your question. It depends on what kind of seed and it depends on how the seeds are stored until next season.

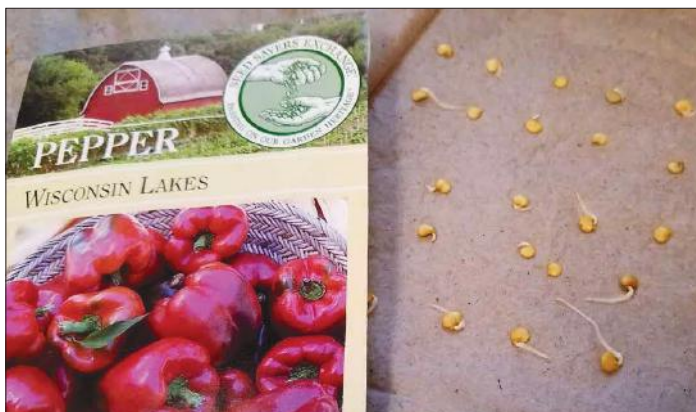
First of all, keep seeds in the original package if possible. These seed packets have so much valuable information, including the year they were packaged. The date packaged will eliminate guessing.

You can store the seed packages in a glass jar with a tight-fitting lid. Plastic containers, Ziploc bags and vacuum sealing bags are all adequate storage containers as well. You want to make sure the container you use protects the seed packets from moisture.

Some experts advise placing rice, powdered milk or some other kind of desiccant in the container to absorb moisture. Moisture is the enemy! Seeds easily reabsorb moisture. If this happens, they will end up moldy.

Whatever storage container you use needs to be placed in a dark, cool location. You have several options. You may decide to store them in a cooler part of the house, or a dry, cool basement.

As a rule, storing your seeds at 40 degrees Fahrenheit is optimal. However, storing seeds in a cool, dark place that stays below 55-60 degrees Fahrenheit will work sufficiently well for many seed types. The location needs to have consistent



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Place seeds an even distance in a damp paper towel and place in a warm area after rolling up the towel. Check germination after three to seven days.

temperature and humidity. A garage or shed is not a good choice.

Many gardeners store their seeds in the refrigerator which is suitable in terms of temperature. However, since the temperature and humidity level both rise every time you open the refrigerator door, it is best to put your seeds in the back corner of the lowest shelf. This location will provide the most stable temperature.

Vacuum sealing the seeds in a plastic food storage bag and storing them in the freezer is another option.

When you remove the package or container from the freezer or refrigerator, let it come to room temperature before opening it. This will prevent the introduction of condensation.

Every time a seed experiences less than ideal

conditions, its longevity and viability decline. The longer you save seeds, the lower your germination rates will be.

When you are ready to plant those saved seeds, you may want to test for viability. Ross Penhallegon, a horticulturist with OSU Extension Service, suggests the following test:

- Place 10 seeds an even distance apart on a damp paper towel. Roll up the towel and place in a plastic bag.
- Leave the damp, rolled towel in a warm spot. The location's lighting doesn't matter.
- After three to seven days, check the paper towel to see which seeds have germinated.

"The percentage of seed germinating in the towel will give you a fairly good idea how the same seed will do in the garden," Penhallegon said. "If half the seed did well in the towel, half of the same batch of seed

MORE INFORMATION

Below is a list showing the amount of time you could store seeds and still expect them to be viable. Of course, the timeframe is very dependent on the proper storage of your seeds.

One year: parsnips, spinach, and all pelleted seeds

Two years: beets, sweet corn, leeks, lettuce, onions, parsley, peppers, Swiss chard

Three years: bush and pole beans, carrots, cucumbers, melons, mustards, peas, squashes, tomatoes, turnips

One-three years: annual flower seeds

Two-four years: perennial flower seeds

Three-five years: broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, collards, kale, kohlrabi

will probably do well in the garden."

Once you have properly stored your seeds and are eagerly awaiting the next garden, the challenge is to take into account what you have stored before buying new seed packets.

Use them up because your garden seeds will not last forever.

Do you have a gardening or insect question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu or 541-672-4461 or visit 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg, Douglas County Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who help the OSU Extension Service serve the people of Douglas County.

