

## GATHERING SEED

Seeds are ripe...



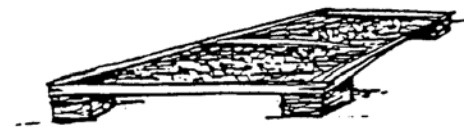
- when they fall easily from the plant
- when pods lose their green color and turn brown
- when the stem holding the seedhead is brown and dry
- when the seed capsule opens
- about a month after flowering
- when they pass your expert inspections: ripe seeds are plump, hard and usually brown or black; unripe seeds are still soft and green

Seed collecting gear: – paper bags, large or small  
– i.d. books, wildflowers and grasses  
– clippers  
– waterproof markers  
– clothespins/clips/twist-ties/string/rubberbands

Decide what to collect...When you are collecting seeds take no more than 1/3 of the seed from one plant and never more than 1/3 from a site. This ensures that you get a genetic diversity and you leave seed for wildlife and self sowing.

If you have --

- a set of screens
- enough horizontal space, out of the sun, with enough air movement, such as a porch or unheated bedroom or very dry basement



– then you can collect **JUST THE SEEDS**, even if it has rained recently. (That's not ideal, but it can work out as long as you unbag the seeds as soon as possible, spread them out on the screens, and shake or turn them occasionally.)

Otherwise,

- Collect seedheads with stems long enough to bundle together.
- Pop drier, more easily shatterable types into paper bags right in the field.
- Remove leaves from stems with a quick stripping motion – this will speed up drying. Don't worry if you miss a few
- An unheated garage, or any unheated room out of direct sunlight, can provide wall space to suspend cords and/or sets of nails or hooks.
- Label each variety, along with date collected.
- Separate into manageable bundles, small enough so air can circulate freely. All but the thickest stalks should be put seedhead-down into a paper bag, to save as much seed as possible.

Check your collection...

- Every week to 10 days, for dryness and rodent damage.
- Rotate the larger, thicker-stalked ones.
- When they are dry enough, separate out the seeds from the rest of the stems and plant parts, and transfer them to labeled glass jars.



- Store the jars away from areas with fluctuating temperatures, but where you will still remember to check them visually for moisture, etc. Do not refrigerate or mix with sand, etc until you have decided which propagation method and time-table you will be using.
- Harold Rock's *Prairie Propagation Handbook*, Marie Sperka's *Growing Wildflowers*, and Clarence and Eleanor Birdseye's *Growing Woodland Plants* should be consulted to help you decide which propagation method to use for each species. Another good resource is "Growing and propagating Wildflowers", by William Cullina and published by the New England Wild Flower Society. On the Internet, take a look at Prairie Moon Nursery's catalog at <http://www.prairiemoon.com/> and download their catalog. The tell you how to prepare almost any species.
- Winter is a good time to decide how you will propagate each species and put that info right on each jar's label.