



DOWLING COMMUNITY GARDEN

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Saving Tomato Seeds

Why save your own seeds?

Each season, fewer varieties of previously available seeds are offered by seed companies. Tomatoes are being developed that store and ship well, but may not taste as flavorful or be as colorful as older varieties. There are thousands of tomatoes to choose from, and many are not commercially available.

Dowling Community Garden is part of the world-wide community of seed savers helping to preserve our culinary and cultural heritage. Each year, selected seeds of heirloom vegetables and flowers are saved and offered to Dowling gardeners, and made available internationally through Seed Savers Exchange and Seeds Diversity of Canada.

References

Goldman, Amy (2008) *Saving Heirloom Tomato Seeds* [online]
www.rareforms.com/gardening/saving-heirloom-tomato-seeds/

Ashworth, Suzanne. *Seed to Seed: Seed Saving and Growing Techniques for Vegetable Gardeners*. Seed Savers Exchange, 2002.

Apple, Heather. *How to Save Your Own Vegetable Seeds*. Seeds of Diversity Canada, 1999.

Useful web sites

Seed Savers Exchange
www.seedsavers.org

Seeds of Diversity Canada
www.seeds.ca

International Seed Saving Institute
www.seedsave.org/issi/issi_904.html

Growing Tomatoes for Seed Saving

Make sure your tomato varieties are labeled “open pollinated” or “heirloom”; hybrid seeds will not produce offspring identical to their parents. Save seeds from more than one plant to maintain genetic diversity.

You will need to cover tomato blossoms with a bag made of fine mesh fabric or row cover material before the flowers open. Leave the bag on the tomato stem until fruits have formed, then remove bag and mark stem with colored string. Let fruit mature on the plant until very ripe.



bagged tomato blossom

Saving Seeds

Tomato seeds must be fermented to destroy seed-borne diseases and remove the gel surrounding the seeds that inhibits germination.

Cut a cross hatch in the bottom of the tomato and squeeze the juice and seeds into a glass or plastic bowl. Let seeds ferment for about 48-72 hours in a warm place. A thick, smelly, moldy foam will form.

After fermentation, add an equal amount of water to the mass of tomato seeds and stir it up a little bit. Let the seeds settle. The good seeds that are dense will fall to the bottom and the empty seed cases will float to the top. Pour off the debris. Add water. Repeat process a couple of times until you are left with pure seeds.

Blot dry on a paper towel. Place seeds on a paper plate and label. Dry at room temperature and keep ventilated for about a week or so. Put the seeds to the brittle test to see if they are dry enough to go into long-term storage. Take the seed and bend it. If it snaps in half, it's dry.

Storing Seeds

Tomato seeds must be well dried and kept in a cool, dry, dark place for long term storage and viability. Place seeds in a paper packet and then into a moisture proof container, such as a glass jar with a screw-on lid. Storing seeds in the freezer or refrigerator, where there are no fluctuations of temperature, will extend seed life.

Option: To be extra certain seeds are dry, put them in a jar with silica gel before long term storage. Remove seeds after a week and place them in an airtight container.