What are Seeds?

A plant produces seeds in order to reproduce itself. Just like an egg has to be fertilized to become a new animal, a seed must be pollinated to produce a new plant. Understanding pollination is key to getting seeds to produce the plants you want. Some plants are **self-pollinating**—the male and female parts are contained within a single flower that fertilizes itself. Other plants, called **cross-pollinators**, have separate male and female flowers and their pollen has to get from one flower to another in order for the flowers to be fertilized.

The seeds from families of plants that are self-pollinating are labeled "**easy**" to save. The most widely crossing of the cross-pollinators are labeled "**advanced**" because it takes effort to keep them from crossing with each other. And "**medium**" seeds fall somewhere in between because they can cross with other plants of their species.

Types of Seeds

Open-pollinated or **heirloom** varieties have been grown for so many generations that their physical and genetic qualities are relatively stable. This seed will be "true to type" if saved. In simple terms, you will reap what you sow.

Hybrid seeds. If a packet has *hybrid*, *F1*, or *VF* written on it, seeds from those plants will not produce plants like the parent plant. They may produce something somewhat or very different, or they may produce nothing at all.

Plant Families

If you learn the family, genus and species of vegetables, you will also learn their basic seed saving needs and risks.

Families define the basic form of the flower parts of plants. All plants with the same flower (and reproductive) structure are in the same family.

Genera (singular: Genus) define more closely related plants. Crosses between genera are rare but can occur.

Species define specific botanically recognized plants with similar fruit, flowers, and leaves. Plants within one species will readily cross with each other.

Cultivars are cultivated varieties that can cross with each other but will not cross with varieties of other species. When we save seeds we usually want to maintain a cultivar or breed a new one.

Example:
Family: Cucurbitaceae **Genus:** *Cucurbita*
Species: *Cucurbita pepo* **Cultivars**: Acorn squash, Warted gourd

Squash and gourd are the same species and can easily cross-pollinate, which might result in an inedible variety. That is why they are labeled "advanced."

How to Save Seeds

Seed Library of Pima County Public Library

The Seed Library's mission is to help nurture a thriving community of gardeners and seed savers. In addition to providing access to free seeds, we hope to help support gardeners and seed savers, from beginner to expert, through the process of growing, harvesting, and seed saving. Through our partnerships with community organizations such as Native Seeds/SEARCH, the Community Food Bank, and the UA Cooperative Extension's Master Gardeners, we will offer a variety of free gardening and seed saving programs throughout the year.

The Seed Library is located in five branches:

Flowing Wells Library: 594-5225
Himmel Park Library: 594-5305
Joel Valdez Main Library: 594-5500
Quincie Douglas Library: 594-5335
Salazar-Ajo Library: (520) 387-6075

For more information, please visit our webpage: *www.library.pima.gov* or contact the Library's *Infoline at 791-4010.*

Pima County Public Library