

# The Grower's Spade

*Horticulture tools for your farm and garden*



Yadkin County Center

July-September 2019

## Home Gardening Edition

### Inside This Issue



- Save the past, sow the future
- Hort Happenings
- Plant spotlight: Joe-pye weed

### Contact



**Hannah Lepsch**  
Horticulture agent  
hannah\_lepsch  
@ncsu.edu

**N.C. Cooperative Extension**  
Yadkin County Center  
2051 Agricultural Way, Ste. 201  
Yadkinville, NC 27055  
P: 336.849.7908  
yadkin.ces.ncsu.edu

## Save the past, sow the future

### *The basics of seed saving*

Late summer is the perfect time to save seeds from your garden. With a little know-how, you can successfully harvest many seeds to plant next year.



Photo courtesy of seedsavers.org

### Why save seeds?

Seed saving is easy, saves money and lets you grow rare, heirloom varieties that aren't available in seed catalogues. Many of the heirloom crops we enjoy, like Cherokee Purple and Mr. Stripy tomatoes, would not be here today if gardeners had not kept seeds year after year. By saving seeds from the best plants, you can over time you can improve your crop: plants that are adapted to the climate, soil, and pests and produce the best tasting fruit.

### Seed saving pitfalls

Not every plant's seeds are worth saving. Only save seeds from open pollinated varieties listed as "heirloom" or "OP" on the seed packet. Hybrid varieties, listed

as "hybrid" or "F1", must be grown from new seed every year to get true-to-type plants. Hybrid varieties result from crossing two different parent plants to combine desirable traits like disease resistance, taste, and fruit quality into a single variety. Seeds from hybrid varieties won't "come true" and may be sterile. There are many reasons to plant hybrids, such as their "hybrid vigor", but don't try to save seeds!

Another problem is cross pollination of different varieties. Crops such as melon, cucumber, spinach and onions tend to cross-pollinate by wind or insects with other plants. If growing more than one variety, the resulting seed will produce unexpected characteristics. Different varieties of cross-pollinating crops need to be isolated or grown at a large distance if you intend to save seed. The easiest way to do this in a small garden is to time plantings so that varieties bloom at different times.



### Seed saving essentials:

1. Select strong, disease-free plants with qualities you desire such as fruit size and flavor, vigorous growth and days to maturity.

2. Harvest seed from fully mature fruit.

*Note: For some plants, like cucumber and squash, this is past the normal time to pick. Wait until the end of the season to let fruit become overly mature because this discourages further fruit production.*

3. Fully dry seed before storing.



## How to save...

Beans and peas tend to self-pollinate but different varieties should still be grown at least 10 ft apart. Collect pods when they start to dry but before splitting. Allow pods to dry 1-3 more weeks before shelling the seeds.

Carrot, lettuce, onion, herb and flower seeds can be left on the plant to dry. Spread or hang cut stalks in a dry, well-ventilated area to finish drying. For small or light weight seeds, place dry seed head in a paper bag that will catch falling seed.

Peppers and tomatoes often self-pollinate, but grow different varieties 20-30 ft apart to avoid an occasional cross. Harvest the fruit when fully ripe. For tomatoes, scrape the pulp and seeds into an airtight container (trust me, you do not want to smell this), add water, and let ferment 2-3 days. Once seeds settle to the bottom, pour off the pulp, rinse, and spread seeds on a paper towel to dry. For peppers, simply cut the fruit in half, remove seeds, and let dry on a paper towel.



Fermenting tomato seeds

Melons, cucumbers and squash can be saved if you plant a single variety. Allow the fruit to stay on the vine until skin is yellow and tough. Scoop out the seed mass from the fruit, scrub on a sieve to remove flesh or prepare like tomato seeds.

### Storing seeds

After fully dry, store seeds in a glass jar or envelope. Place in the freezer for 2 days to kill pests, then store in a cool, dry place like the refrigerator. Most seeds remain viable for 3 to 5 years, however, some seeds such as parsley, spinach, onion, and sweet corn should be used the next growing season.

You can access a handy "Seed Saving Chart" online at [www.seedsavers.org/seed-saving-chart](http://www.seedsavers.org/seed-saving-chart). So, resist the urge to slice up that last homegrown tomato for a tomato sandwich! The reward of eating the same heirloom variety the following year is well worth the delayed gratification and time to save your own seed.

## Hort Happenings



### May-October

#### Yadkin Farmers Market

1141 Tennessee Street, Yadkinville  
Tuesday 3-6 pm; Saturday 9 am - 1 pm

### September

#### 10-11 Environmental Field Day

Yadkin county schools 6<sup>th</sup> grade

#### 17 Agents in the market: fall greens

Yadkin Farmers Market

### October

#### 22 Workshop: "Composting basics"

Yadkin County Public Library

## Plant Spotlight

### Joe Pye weed



Joe Pye Weed (*Eutrochium spp*), also called Feverweed or Queen of the Meadow, is a native perennial that grows naturally along streams and wet thickets. Many people think of it as a roadside weed, and never consider its ornamental value or importance for pollinators. Its pink, showy blooms are a late summer food source for butterflies, bees and birds.

### Growing tips

Due to its impressive height, Joe Pye Weed is a great background plant but also requires plenty of space. The erect stems typically grow 4 to 7 ft tall with large leaf whorls. Plants do best in full sun to part-shade, and prefer moist soil. Plant from seed in spring or fall as a rear border or in butterfly gardens. Consider leaving stands on field edges for pollinator habitat.