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Growing your own has never been more popular. It seems we all want a little corner where we can look at beautiful blooms, harvest some vegetables or snip a few herbs to sprinkle on our favourite dishes.

But having your own patch needn't cost the earth. With a little effort you can save lots of money and simply collect seeds yourself. Not only does this give you free plants for next year, if you exchange seeds with other people you get to learn about new varieties and make lots of friends, too. You could even go one step further and make a seed box to store your seeds in.



You Will Need:

- A small box with a lid
- Small paper envelopes or sachets
- Acrylic or poster paints
- A paint brush
- Non-toxic glue
- Stamps & inks or felt-tip pens
- Raffia or garden twine
- Fun nature toppers (optional)
- Clean seeds

Further Steps:

Get involved in a seed exchange or swap. The idea is that farmers or gardeners, who save their own seed, exchange them with others. It removes money restrictions associated with buying seeds, contributes to plant diversity and helps people share information with other growers. Look out for a seed swap advertised in your local area or join an online seed swap forum such as The River Cottage Community – The Seed Exchange: <http://community.rivercottage.net/forums/the-seed-exchange>

The Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) has ideas for seed swap events on its website: www.rhs.org.uk

How To Do It:

1. Paint a box with white paint to hide any lettering/graphics. Let dry thoroughly.
2. Apply a second coat of paint to the box in a colour of your choice. Leave to dry. Decorate your seed box using stamps or felt-tip pens. NOTE; if your box is intended as a present, add a label and some fun Nature toppers for an extra special touch.
3. Paint some small envelopes and decorate in a similar style to your seed box. Label each envelope with the name of your intended seeds. You could add a little raffia or twine hook to each sachet, as well.
4. Now you are ready to fill your box with seeds. Tip clean seeds into the appropriate sachets and seal. Place the sachets/envelopes into your box. You now have a great seed store to sew next year or swap with friends!

Did You Know?

Annuals are some of the best plants to grow from home-saved seed. Four easy varieties are:

- Love-in-a-mist (Nigella Damascena)
- Sunflower (Helianthus Annuus)
- Cosmos (Cosmos Bipinnatus)
- Honesty (Lunaria Annuus)

Collecting Seeds

Choose a dry, windless day in late summer or early autumn to collect seeds. Select a healthy plant, whose seedpods have turned brown and look as if they're about to split. Cut off the entire seedhead and tip it upside down into a paper bag. Tie string to close the bag and label it to avoid confusion later. Check the seeds progress regularly. When most of the seedpods have opened, tip out the contents onto a dry surface and separate the seeds from any bits of seedhead still attached. Finally, store the cleaned seed in a small, dry envelope; seal and label carefully.

Crafty Tips:

- Always store seed in a cool, dry, airy place until ready for sowing. Damp seed will rot.
- Leave some seedheads untouched in the garden – seeds are a good food source for birds during the winter.
- Make some card dividers for your seed box to organise your seeds into separate categories; annuals, herbs, vegetables...
- Make your own seed packets and sell them to raise money for a charity or local community project.

