

WHAT IS A SEED LIBRARY?

“Seed libraries connect those individuals already interested in seeds with those who are just being introduced to the world of gardening and seed saving. Seed libraries are contributing to seed literacy which is an important component of seed security.” Bob Wildfong, Executive Director, Seeds of Diversity

WHAT IS SEED SECURITY?

Seeds are the foundation of the food we eat. Seed security means that farmers have access to good quantities of high quality seed. Seed security also includes biodiversity – growing many different types of seeds.

Seeds contain genetic traits (like drought or pest resistance), many of which we may not even know

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A seed library is a public collection of seeds where anyone can “borrow” small quantities of seeds and grow them out. If the resulting seeds are saved, some of them can be returned to the library for the next grower! Seed libraries are usually small-scale, focused on education, outreach and community building ... and, they are not always in book libraries! Seed libraries can be mobile, or located in recreation centres, community gardens, or anywhere!

HOW DO THEY DIFFER FROM OTHER KINDS OF SEED COLLECTIONS?

Other types of organizations also work towards conserving seeds and biodiversity.

Seed banks and gene banks are locations where plant material is placed in short- and long-term storage, intended to preserve the plant's genetics. Seed banks contain seeds and are usually managed by community or non-profit groups. Gene banks tend to store different kinds of plant tissues, and are usually

about yet. Saving a diversity of seeds gives us options because we may really need those traits in the future. Planting different crops, and different varieties of those crops, means we have more choices. It's also a kind of insurance, because if one crop variety fails, we have backups!



government-run. Here, emphasis is on high seed quality and safe storage of sometimes rare seeds.

Seed companies are seed collections too. They are commercial businesses that grow and/or import, package, and sell seeds to gardeners and farmers. By offering seeds for sale, seed companies play a part in ensuring that those varieties are circulated and continually grown and propagated.

	SEED BANK	GENE BANK	SEED LIBRARY	SEED COMPANY
Free Seed	✔	✔	✔	✘
Bulk Seed	✘	✘	✘	✔
Large Variety of Seed	✔	✔	?	✘
Rare or Fragile Seed	✔	✔	✘	✘
Research Focus	✔	✔	✘	?
Public Education Focus	✘	✘	✔	✘
Non-seed Plant Material	✘	✔	✘	✔

☞ = it depends

EXPECTATIONS

As a seed library member, you're part of a community where:

- everyone is welcome and encouraged to learn
- beginner seed savers will find resources to support their enthusiasm for food and seed
- advanced seed savers will share their knowledge and experience freely
- you won't always receive perfect seed, but the seed you get will always teach you something.

SEED INTEGRITY

Seed libraries want to ensure that members have positive experiences with seed saving. To this end, some seed libraries ask you to self-evaluate your seed saving skills. Your honest self-assessment will help the seed library connect you with the right seeds to grow, as well as relevant learning resources. For a start, you may want to let them know how many years you've been saving seed, and what crops you've worked with. Some seed libraries accept seed returns from members and others focus on distributing seed exclusively.

“In the seed library it doesn't matter all that much if the beans you've grown out got cross-pollinated and turn out to be yellow instead of green, but in the seed bank it would matter a whole lot. The seed library is about access for backyard gardeners and community gardeners to experiment and learn. It plays a conserving function by keeping interest alive in local seeds.” Su Morin, seed educator, NS