

## TOOLS for SEED COLLECTING and CLEANING

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As an individual who has enjoyed making things my whole life and who earned a living as a designer and master craftsman for many years, I can tell you with certainty that the very best tools of all are strong hands, deft fingers, good observational skills, and practice. Other than that, if you read on through this list, you will probably notice that a lot of the useful tools and other items come from the kitchen!

### FOR COLLECTING

**Brown lunch bags.** Especially good for “pods that pop.” Close the top!

**Small manila coin envelopes.** For small amounts of seeds collected over time; be sure to label as you collect

**Wax sandwich bags.** Good for storage, but hard to label. Keep them open.

**Small deli-style plastic containers.** These are great for accumulating those small amounts you’re collecting over time. Put a label in each one, and keep them open. They are also good when collecting some types of seeds.

### FOR DRY-CURING THE SEEDS

**Post-its.** I fold one in half and then print the botanical name on it; they are placed with the seeds in boxes or open cups. I keep them, filed away, to reuse year after year. They are also a useful little tool for cleaning seeds.

**Stationery boxes, tops and bottoms.** These are cheap from a printer and I like that I can close the boxes, though mostly I use them open. They are fundamental to our seed cleaning processes, and easy to store.

**Brown paper bags.** Any size up to grocery-sized, for large amounts of cut plant materials with seeds that are dry-curing.

**Large plastic cement-mixing trays.** Also for large amounts of plant materials with seeds. I use these in summer only, and keep them in a dry, shady place out of the wind.

### FOR CLEANING THE SEEDS

**Stationery boxes.** We clean into these boxes—one for almost-cleaned seeds and another for unwanted plant parts of each species we are working with. We also use them held at a steep slope, with all the mostly-clean seed scraped to one end with a folded post-it, and then we help gravity along a bit to let all the heavier seeds fall to the other end, minus most of the plant detritus!

**Deli containers.** The “mostly” cleaned seeds can be placed in this deeper, smaller container, and then safely taken outside on a calm day in order to blow off the remaining small plants debris, leaving the seeds really clean!

**Paper bags of various sizes.** Good for cleaning into and also accumulating the unwanted plants parts.

**Wax paper and bags.** Hard seed capsules can be crushed inside a closed wax bag to release the seeds inside. Wax paper is the best thing to use to dry wet seeds that have been removed from berries.

**Rolling pin.** Good for crushing hard seed capsules

**Meat tenderizing hammer.** Also good for crushing hard seed capsules

**Flat-bottomed cups.** Yet another “tool” useful for crushing hard capsules

**Bamboo or metal barbecue skewers.** These can be used to pick out the chaff and seeds from a composite flower head

**Small clippers.** Useful for cutting away extra plant materials

**Tweezers.** Good for getting seeds dislodged from dense composite flower heads, and sometimes just to hold onto something like a prickly thistle flower while getting at the seeds with another tool

**Soil Screens with various sized openings/mesh.** Smaller mesh is more useful. Such sieves are inexpensive and can be modified with a piece of window screening; a set of real seed sieves is very expensive.

**Plastic gloves.** To protect your skin while cleaning seeds from plants that contain a lot of resins and aromatic oils.

#### FOR EXTRACTING SEEDS FROM BERRIES

**Glass or plastic jars, with and without lids.** I let berries soak in water and when they have softened, do a lot of hand squishing! The flesh separates and floats, while the heavier seeds sink to the bottom—mostly, anyway—and it can all be encouraged to separate by slowly running water into it. Usually it takes successive cleanses like this. As I begin to extract the clean seeds, I put them on wax paper to dry, then later move to more permanent storage.

#### FOR STORAGE OF CLEANED AND THOROUGHLY DRY CURED SEEDS

**Paper envelopes, clean containers, glass or plastic.** Whatever you prefer and have room for; just remember to label your seeds!

**Pencils.** So you can always erase, reuse and recycle!

**10x lens.** Especially important to discern the really fine details!

#### A WORD ABOUT THE “LEAVINGS”

I always save the leftover plant materials after we have separated the seeds, which I then cut or crush into smaller bits and call it “wildflower straw.” I spread this “straw” out in places on my property where I want to enhance biodiversity, and amazing things happen! I do the same with the flesh cleaned from berries; at least three of the most vigorous elderberry trees on my property came about in this way.