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# HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

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U. S. DEPARTMENT  
OF AGRICULTURE  
OFFICE OF INFORMATION

Tuesday, August 8, 1944

QUESTION BOX:

Shall I save garden seed?  
Difference in beans?

ANSWERS FROM:

Garden specialists of the U. S.  
Department of Agriculture.

If today's mail is a fair example, Victory gardeners are already looking forward to better gardens for next year. They're already writing about seeds. I'd say from the questions coming in that we have two kinds of gardeners. No. 1, those who get hours of pleasure from reading the seed catalogues. No. 2, those who yearn to do a bit of seed-growing, themselves.

First question, comes from a brand-new gardener. Says she: "This is my first experience in gardening but I wish you could see what lovely tomatoes I have. They are the nicest I have seen, smooth, a beautiful red, and delicious. I think they must appreciate my loving care for I do enjoy working with them. Could I save seed from them for next year's garden? How could I go about doing this?"

I'm sure that writer is a born gardener and her patriotic Victory Gardening has awakened a latent talent. I hope she may always have a garden. Yes, the vegetable garden specialists in the United States Department of Agriculture say, under some circumstances it is worth while to save seed from varieties of vegetables that do especially well in your garden, although in general it is better to buy your seed than take them from your garden. The specialists say the home gardener can select the seed plants according to the rules used by seedsmen and, too, the plants selected will be the ones that succeed best under the local environment. They warn, though, that some plant diseases are carried by seed. Seeds from plants affected by diseases may cause serious loss or failure. If you think of saving seed from your tomatoes, say the specialists, inspect your plants throughout the season with critical



eye. If they are healthy, vigorous plants and you have a yen for seed-saving, the chances are good for your success next year with home-grown seed.

Here is how you go about it. Select one or more vigorous, healthy plants that bear a high proportion and a large quantity of good clean fruit. You get better results from seed of a plant that bears fruit about the same size and shape. Don't be tempted to save seed from the one extra nice fruit on a vine with other fruits on it of poor quality. Next year's crop would probably be more like the poor fruit.

Then you mark the plants you select and let the fruits stay on the vines until they are very ripe - past the edible condition - but pick them before they start to decay. Cut the fruit in half, cutting across the seed cells. Push or squeeze out the seeds and seed pulp onto a square of coarse muslin, fold them in and work this energetically with your fingers under water. You'll find the pulp can be forced out through the cloth and the seeds left inside. When the seed is clean, you spread it thinly in an airy place to dry and then store it. An ordinary letter envelope makes a fairly satisfactory container for a small amount of seed if you handle it carefully so the seed won't sift out. And be sure to label the seeds. Keep them in a dry, well ventilated room. Cellars are too moist, attics usually too hot.

I hope we may hear, next summer, how these seeds respond to the new gardener's care. Something tells me her family tree would show a grandmother who was one of those capable pioneer women who carried their garden seeds with them when they journeyed to the new home in the wilderness.

Here is a letter from a Victory Gardener. She has heard members of her garden club talk about varieties bred for characteristics like flavor, or resistance to disease, or early production. This is what she writes: "I had never thought of there being any difference in plants of the same kind. I thought peas were always just peas or beans, just beans. But some of the more experienced gardeners in our club disagree. They tell me some varieties we now have are quite different from



the original stock and that new types are frequently to be found--they are always talking about the new bean or what-have-you that this or that seedsman describes in his new catalogue. IS there really any difference in kinds of beans or peas? Or is this just hobby talk?

Your experienced gardeners are right. Seedsmen and plant breeding research workers are constantly carrying on variety improvement work with most of our garden and commercially produced vegetables. Recently I heard of an improved variety of snap bean which resulted from breeding and selection work during twelve growing seasons. Now the plant breeder has a variety that has proved to be practically immune to diseases that are common in his area. Don't some of you Victory Gardeners remember being given the task of stringing the beans for dinner when you were children? Now, the string has so generally disappeared they don't even say "string" beans any more; they are called "stringless" or "snap" beans, instead. That didn't just happen. It is the result of long, careful selection of individual plants that had desirable characteristics and perhaps using these for cross-pollination or "mixing" with other plants that had what the plant breeder was looking for. Plant breeding is an exacting science as well as an art that must take a lot of patience as well as knowledge and training. Then when the new variety is definitely established the seedsmen have to be very careful in growing plants to produce our supply of seed. Soil, moisture, climate, and such must be right, and they must be on guard against disease. The hardest job is to keep the variety true and unmixed with undesirable seed. They go through their fields to pull out any inferior plants or mixtures that might have crept in, so the seed will be pure.

There is a great deal of hard work and patience and even adventure behind the packets of seed you buy for your Victory Garden. It's up to us, then, to do as well, give the plants the care their past entitles them to. A look around our neighborhood makes me feel proud of the way our Victory Gardeners have lived up to that responsibility. Keep it up, fellow V-Gardeners. The best is yet to come for the faithful Victory Gardener.

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