



# Discussion #1: Seed Quality and Education - Notes

Date: Monday, August 19th

Time: 11am PST, 2pm EST

Hosts: [Community Seed Network](#), [Seeds of Diversity Canada](#), [Farm Folk City Folk](#)

Number of participants: 40

[A bit about those in attendance](#)

Our first discussion was all about seed quality and education. Below is the agenda which guided our hour-long get together.

1. Welcome, host introductions, and session framing (15 minutes)
2. Breakout rooms (30 minutes)
3. Debrief and wrap-up (15 minutes)

The session began with a brief introduction to the facilitators and organizations hosting the discussion, as well as the reasons for organising the session.

Then, we broke out into three breakout rooms for more intimate, focused discussions. Below is an overview of some of the main themes, followed by more detailed notes from each room.

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## General Themes & Thoughts

*What are major challenges for seed quality in seed libraries?*

- Climate and seed adaptation needs
- Seed donations without enough information / without knowing how the seeds were grown out
- Lack of seed testing
- Mixed results with seeds from companies
- Seed growers without stable housing impacts ability to participate

*What strategies, resources, and topics would help us increase and maintain the quality of our seeds?*

*Strategies:*

- Starting with the simplest varieties to increase success rate
- Hosting community events (e.g. Seedy Saturdays)
- Hosting demonstrations (e.g. germination testing)
- 2-level system for library - one with more verified high quality seeds, and one for unknown/lesser quality seeds
- Having templates for seed return sheets, envelopes, etc.
- Having a resource database shared amongst seed library organizers

*Resources:*

- [Going to Seed](#)
- [Landrace Gardening Book](#)
- Workbook developed by Fernie Seed Library - get in touch: [garden.fernier@gmail.com](mailto:garden.fernier@gmail.com)
- [BC Mobile Seed Cleaner](#) (do any others exist?)

*Topics:*

- Native seeds, invasive species, germination testing, cross pollination ([poster from FFCF](#)), seed selection, seed cleaning

## Breakout Room #1

We had folks from BC, Ottawa, Davis Bay, Sunshine Coast, Alberta, Bella Coola, ON, NS, NL. Some part of established collections others aspiring to start collections in their communities.

- Seed collection is part of the mission to strengthen urban food security which includes working with folks with very limited growing space/resources.

*Prompting question: What do you see as major challenges for seed quality in seed libraries?*

- The challenge for one organizer is their mountain climate.

- Random squash seeds donated to one library - things that aren't going to breed true. This organizer doesn't want to discourage people from saving seeds but also needs to prioritize good seed quality and high germination.
  - This takes a lot of teaching.
- Working with kids, the challenge is that they don't take every single seed envelope home!
- One seed library has a good number of seed savers whom they know and trust among their membership. One issue they see is lots of people are unsure about whether they will continue to live in their current houses/ renters / unstable housing affects seed saving.

*Prompting question: What strategies, resources, and topics would help us increase and maintain the quality of our seeds?*

- One library does demonstrations and community events, for example, on sunflowers so that groups can do this together. The more you "drone on and on" about isolation and how "promiscuous" these plants are, the more people will get it.
- One organizer found that they like to start with the easy ones - beans, tomatoes, peas – that don't need a lot of isolation. They also print out info sheets on how to save them: just the basics so that no one gets overwhelmed and they provide a contact number and email address for questions.
- In a small community, coordinating the squash grow-outs among numerous growers could be helpful. Trust and communication/transparency is key among growers.
- One library has a lot of gardeners who use balcony spaces in which case plants are portable.
- One library has an intake form - most of their members come from social media, all across Canada – which asks basic questions about experience levels of gardening and seed saving. People are very keen to talk about their gardening - very passionate about it.
- What about a set of cards with graphics for each Family that provides what crosses with what (denoted by either an X or a checkmark) with a number indicating the community isolation distance?
- Would be great to get people to do a germination test before returning seed
  - Some have done germination test demonstrations which people were pretty excited about
- If they can't guarantee isolation, one organizer puts them in a different category ("returned seeds" use at your own risk) so that they are being transparent
- One library has been thinking of buying a set of seed cleaning screens for their "library of things" so that they can invite members for a seed cleaning party.
  - Get from harvest to planting seasons, keep people engaged.
  - The DIY Seed Cleaner is a great tool to show how to clean seeds and the importance of cleaned seeds.

- Homemade thresher (5 gallon bucket with paint paddle and chains) to demonstrate seed cleaning - a fun and loud event. Good equipment is important for engagement events. The mobile seed cleaner in BC is a great way to engage people.

*What kinds of events are people doing?*

- Fall sunflower event, microgreens using brassica seeds
- Seedy Saturdays are big events with big potential for seed education
- Anything that can encourage people to see seeds as an important part of their gardening and food will help engagement.

## Breakout Room #2

*Prompting question: What do you see as major challenges for seed quality in seed libraries?*

- Don't know if people are isolating seeds.
- Don't test seeds
- Rely on donations and don't do any testing
- Research on seed company seeds has mixed results. E.g. West Coast Seeds seem to have low germination rates; Salt Spring Seeds is really good and so is BCESC.
- For one library, knowing the people who saved the seeds means they can call them and ask how they produced the seeds
  - Do seed testing of more important seeds.
  - Sometimes ask specific people to grow them out.
  - Questions about how the seeds are asked by some libraries but not all. Some people just don't fill in the form fully.
  - Consider putting all the info on the actual seed packet.
  - Most do germ testing but not other types of tests

*Prompting question: What strategies, resources, and topics would help us increase and maintain the quality of our seeds?*

- Just knowing what questions to ask about seeds
- Templates for envelopes or seed return sheets
- Mary Cosman ([garden.fernier@gmail.com](mailto:garden.fernier@gmail.com)) - Have developed a work book with all kinds of seed saving information that they give to everyone who joins the library. They are happy to share it!
- Some wildflower mixes have invasive species in them. Would be useful to have a list of invasive species
  - The invasive species council in Squamish, BC comes to check the seeds in the library and pull invasive species from the collection.
  - A few people invite the invasive species council to their seed swaps

- Topics of interest/benefit for seed library members: Invasive species, native seed
- Valuable resource idea: A central location with templates and information that could be borrowed

### Breakout Room #3

*Prompting question: What do you see as major challenges for seed quality in seed libraries?*

- Seed adaptation in the north is important
- Quality = starting viability + isolation + storage + rejuvenation
  - How to ensure all of these?
- Seed libraries rely on participants' self-assessment of seed saving ability. Rely on a few people who are great seed savers.

*Prompting question: What strategies, resources, and topics would help us increase and maintain the quality of our seeds?*

- Education around selection is key to maintaining varieties and quality.
- [Going to Seed](#) developed guides for 5-6 crops for their growers, want collaboration to improve and extend guides. Accessible so amateur growers / small space growers who can't achieve the standards of seed companies. But do they have to?
- Mindset shift of what matters - Joseph Lofthouse "[Landrace Gardening Book](#)" - landraces can adapt to locations, and this should be more recognized.
- Plant breeders used to try to develop improvements in diverse genotypes but more recently uniformity has become overly prioritized.
- One library has opted for 2 levels to their system: the cabinet has seeds that are probably good quality and that will grow as people expect; the share-around box that has seeds that might not be so good, but people have lower expectations from a bin of random seeds or a swap table.
- Has anybody come back and complained about quality? No, people are happy to get free seeds

### *Next Up*

Session #2 is Tuesday, August 27 @ 11am PST, 2pm EST

[Register on Eventbrite](#)

Do you have resources you're willing to add to a shared database, related to seed quality and education? We'd like to hear from you!