

POLLINATION AND CROSS POLLINATION

I was asked if planting hybrid seeds next to non-hybrid seeds would cause cross-pollination, which would result in sterile seeds for next year's garden. The answer would have to a general "no," but that would depend upon the seed/plant species planted. Brassicas (the cabbage family), for example, do not produce seed the first year; nor do many of the garden crops we plant. Saving many plants for seed means overwintering them, so if only a few chosen non-hybrid specimens are saved for seed, no cross-pollination is possible.

The curcubits are a real problem for seed savers. These annual vining plants make fruits which we call cucumbers, melons and squashes. Squashes will not cross-pollinate with cucumber or melons. Winter squashes (c. maxima -- buttercup, hubbard, banana) will cross-breed. Summer squashes (c. pepo -- zucchini, pumpkin, acorn and delicata) all readily cross with one another. Butternuts (c. moschata) are a separate group. Because curcubits will readily cross-breed, and all are bee pollinated, choices for seed savers becomes quite restricted, usually involving growing only one member of each group: buttercups or hubbards, but not both. Zucchini, acorn or pumpkin, but just one variety. The latter choice is relatively easy, because immature acorns have a similar texture and taste to zucchini.

If you plan on saving your own seed for a self-perpetuating garden, don't forget that the flowers/florets need to be pollinated in order to produce viable seed...and the best pollinators are honeybees. With the demise of the feral honeybees to tracheal mites and Varroa mites, reliable pollination now means you should keep a couple of hives of honeybees near your garden, if possible. The side benefit of producing your own honey is also extremely important in survival plans.

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