

## Notes from a seed collector, episode two.

You win some and you lose some in the gardening game and this year has been no exception.

As an avid seed collector and seed saver the prolonged, cool and wet summer is causing some havoc with ripening and seed drying. Ever the optimist however, I expect my collection and my experiments to yield a valuable harvest.

In 2007 I travelled to French Polynesia. In a market on the small island of Huahini I bought some very punchy small chillies with the hope that I could germinate some of the seed. As I write this on yet another wet and windy August day, the two plants I was able to germinate from the pinch of seed I saved are growing slowly and pathetically in the cold greenhouse on my allotment. I hope yet for a warm and long autumn, when the plants might fruit and I could gather some seed to try again next year. The plants are isolated from other capsicums which are growing in another greenhouse in my garden. Of them more anon! The allotment greenhouse is also home to half a dozen plants of a cucumber called Dekah, which I received from the HSL. The crop is reasonably heavy, early, delicious and the plants are robust and fully six feet tall. I have allowed a couple of fruits on each vine to grow to maturity and look forward to harvesting the seed in the next few weeks.

Outside, on the allotment the wet weather has been wonderful for vigour and yield of most, if not all the sixty and more types of vegetables I grow. I was given a few pea seed by an HSL member, Victorian Purple Podded and the plants are cropping well. I have yet to try the peas as I want to save all the seed to grow a full row next year. However, I had no idea how tall they might grow and only now know that I will need at least five foot of support in 2009! Last year I was inundated with requests for my favourite broad bean, Bowland Beauty. Determined not disappoint the many people to whom I could not provide I have grown a thirty foot double row just for seed. The pods are blackening and ripening nicely but I need a few days of dry weather before I can harvest.

I had one surprise- an unintentional cross-pollination. I collect two other broad beans, Canadian Purple flowered and White Continental. I received a letter from a fellow collector who had some Canadian Purple flowered seed from me, to say the plants were both white and purple flowered. Horror of horrors. Even though I had sown seed of the two varieties at different times and opposite ends of the allotment I must have suffered cross-pollinations. Sure enough, when I sowed some purple seed myself, many of the flowers were white. As soon as I became aware of this 'infection' I removed the white flowering plants before they could be pollinated and I just hope that the next generation of beans will be true. But then again, maybe I have created a new hybrid... So, what to call it?

Next year I will see if my White Continental seed is equally corrupted.

I have tried growing a new variety of Brussels Sprout called Seven Hills that another HSL member very kindly gave me. I started them off very early in late January – the time I usually sow sprouts. The plants are strong and vigorous, but one bolted in June and two others have a great crop of sprouts already! I will be interested to see if they hold until the winter. If not I shall try again with a later sowing next year.

The beans I found in a market in Tanzania and grew for the first time last year are growing well. They took time to take off, but are now five feet tall and starting to flower. The crop will be late but I hope can mature before the weather gets too cold. A prolific crop of stubby pods each holding four fat beans. On another part of the allotment I am growing an HSL bean, Bonne Bouche. The young beans are delicious, but I must not be tempted and allow the pods to mature to yield enough beans to share with others and grow more of in the future.

My surprise success this year is one of my staple beans, Ryders' Top o' the Pole. I had a complete germination failure in early May. Despite warming the ground up with a long cloche before sowing seed, come late May there was nothing to see. I had given all but a few of my seed away, but after a foray into the depths of a kitchen cupboard, I found some forgotten and ancient beans meant for the pot. They looked pretty inedible; wrinkled and dull white. But more in hope than certainty I sowed them and to my delight they all germinated. Now I have a magnificent crop of beans. Most I am allowing to mature, some to freeze as fresh shelled beans and some to dry. And of course, some to eat now as tender young whole beans. They are my finest crop.

I tried a Kale called Delaway last year. It's delicious, slow to bolt and very hardy. I left the old plants to go to seed and a few weeks ago I was able to harvest them. The set was not brilliant but after hanging the plants up in my garage – safely cocooned in a bag made from fleece - to dry properly, I still managed to extract a jam-jar full of bright black seeds. I immediately sowed a few and they germinated within a couple of days. So, some time in late September I'll be able to transplant my first lot of home-saved Delaway.

Other crops doing well include the sensational radish Pasque. Shelling the pods is enough to drive a sane man to drink, but, again, once we get a dry spell and the harvest can fully ripen I will be spending happy hours with these unruly plants. Then, as soon as possible I'll sow a couple of rows to harvest through the winter. Yum yum.

And as for the garden greenhouse? A variety of chillis and sweet peppers are growing purely for the table. But I have isolated a couple of plants of a tiny chilli I discovered on the island of Rodriguez – using a curtain of fleece - and will keep back some fruits for their seed.

Time to check the forecast and pray for some sun.

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