

Mother Nature's Greatest Gift: Seeds

by Marlyn Sachtjen

I can truthfully say that two-thirds of the plant material at 'Wind-N-View', my five acre garden in Madison, Wisconsin, is the result of Mother Nature's greatest gift: seed. If you accomplish the art of identifying seedlings you will enrich your gardens with "free plantings". I admit this can be mind-boggling in the beginning.

All who garden with passion and devotion have the most necessary skill of all. You have become observers! Gardeners see more than others see. This is something that isn't taught—it happens. My methods of working with seed may seem unlikely, but after years of trial and error, I've found that the following procedures work well.

The technique I like best is to pat the seeds around the mother plant that is growing in my garden (making sure the area around the mother plant is clean). I germinated huge drifts of plants in my prairies using this technique.

This method of planting in place means that you don't have to remember where you've planted something in order to water it. If it germinates, it is tough and will be determined to grow. This is especially true of trees, conifers and some shrubs.

I do not believe in holding seeds! As soon as a seed is viable I plant it. Mother Nature does not hold plants—why should we? How do you know if a seed is viable? Does the seed rattle in the pod? Does it separate easily from the stem (especially tree seeds)?

Annual and vegetable seeds are another ball game. Some annual seeds (poppies, moss

roses, daisies, etc.) live over the winter and reseed on their own. Others must be harvested, stored in paper or glass, and planted in the spring after frost danger.

I have a tomato that has been self-sowing in my garden for over forty years, although I find that I must give it and other annuals

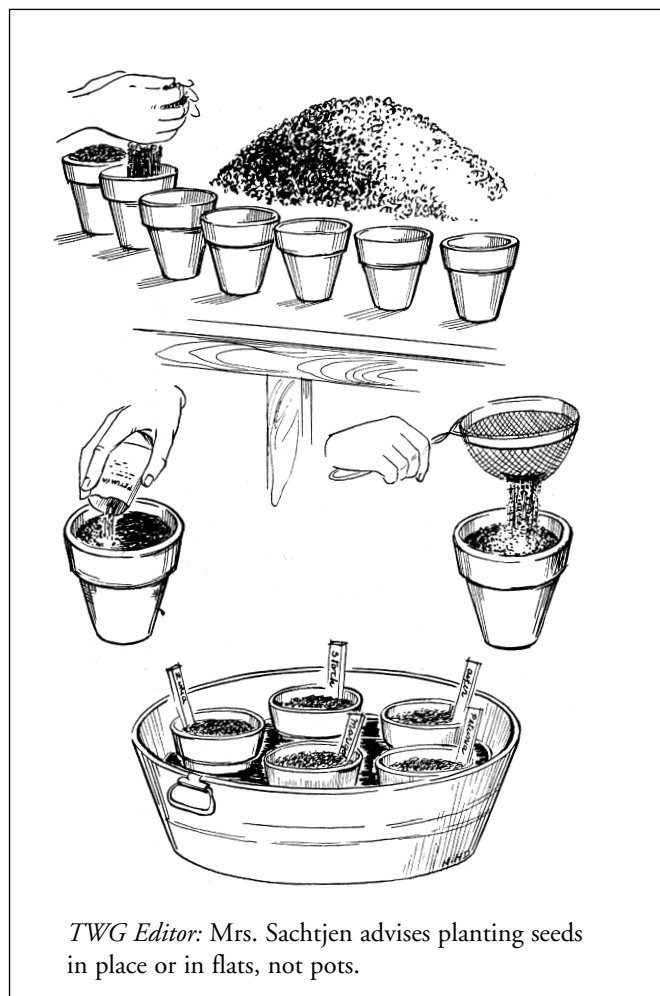
Another technique I use is to divide the seed I take from each plant species in half. Put one half of them in a paper envelope or glass jar. These do not have to be segregated. Mix them all up in one container.

With the remainder of the separated seeds, prepare a flat of wet soil mix. Divide the soil into rows. Sow one species of seed in each row and label each row. Place under lights. As these germinate, examine them daily with a magnifying glass.

When you are confident that you will maintain the ability to identify them, sprinkle all the rest of the seeds that you've saved and firm them well in another flat of wet soil mix. Germinate these. You will have the first flat of labeled seeds to go by so you should be able to identify the second flat using the first flat as a guideline.

By the way, never give up on perennials in flats—if they don't germinate in a reasonable time (anything under a year), I take the flat and dump it in a clean place and smear it around. Lots of times I have germination from these seeds even after three years!

I urge you to start growing from seeds. Once you have succeeded, you will be committed to this method of reproducing your plants.



and vegetable seed a new home each year or they will not produce well. Annuals and vegetables wear out all the food value in their previous home.

Remember hybrids do not reseed "true", so beware of hybridized seeds.



Marlyn Dicken Sachtjen is the author of *Marlyn's Garden: Seasoned Advice for Achieving Spectacular Results in the Midwest* (Timber Press, 1990). "Wind 'n' View" is open to the public after mid-July. Mrs. Sachtjen can be reached at (608) 849-5106.