

Seed Harvesting - Tips from the farm...

Although my duties keep me in the office most of the time at this time of year I can't resist the opportunity to do one of my favorite things, seed harvesting. MWF's harvesting begins in early June, but it is this time of year when the list of species to harvest seems endless.

Our team does the majority of seed harvesting by hand and some mechanically. If you'd like to do some of your own collecting in your wildflower planting here are some tips:

- You'll need the following harvesting supplies; Paper grocery or lunch bags, clippers or scissors, gloves, comb, tray.
- Identify the plant that you would like to harvest and note location.
- Label bag/container.
- Check for seed ripeness. Typically the seed head appears to be dried and breaks up easily or for Asters and Goldenrods the flower head will appear fluffy. Check by cutting a seed head and breaking it up/shaking to see if seed falls out.

Harvest the seed by:

- pulling or clipping the seed head (Bergamot, Blackeyed Susan, Yellow coneflower, Yarrow) off and place into container.
 - Asters and Goldenrods may be collected by clipping the seed head that appears fluffy.
 - For some species you may be clipping a stalk of seed heads (Horsemint, Foxglove beardtongue and Blue lobelia)
 - or stripping/combing the seeds off the stalk/blade (Little bluestem, Thimbleweed, Leadplant).
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- Sow the seed as soon as possible. Mimic Mother Nature's timing for sowing seed and remember the seeds benefit greatly from exposure to the moisture and temperature fluctuations in the coming fall/winter/early spring. The goal is good seed to soil contact. Scratch up the soil surface and rub the harvested seed (or even just the seed head/cluster) into the soil.
 - IF you choose not to seed now, spread on tray to dry further and then store cool, dry and out of the reach of critters hungry for seed.

For your own small scale harvesting seed cleaning is not necessary. However, after harvesting our seed goes into an additional drying phase and then onto the cleaning process to separate the extraneous material from the seed. Seed cleaning equipment such as fanning mills get this work done. We clean in order to submit the seed for testing which includes, germination, purity and existence of weed seed. Having clean seed also helps to make the seed easier to mix with other species and for sowing larger scale projects. We hope that information is helpful and inspires you to get out there and try seed harvesting.