# **COLLECTING AND HANDLING SEEDS**

Adapted from the Indiana Native Plant Society, Dayton Area Wild Ones, and the Tallgrass Prairie Center.

Collecting native plant seeds is an affordable way to grow your own plants, but it must be done responsibly. Avoid overharvesting from wild populations or spreading invasive species. Learn to identify local plants, their flowering times, and how their seeds mature and disperse so you can collect without harming natural communities. Always get **permission** before collecting on public or private land.

## **IDENTIFY THE SPECIES**

Familiarize yourself with local plants and their life cycles. Understanding when flowering, seed formation and seed maturity will occur, as well as how the seeds are dispersed, will help you during the collection process. Scouting while they're in bloom makes identification easier later when they're in seed. Use resources like the Biota of North America Program (BONAP) to check if a species is rare in your state.

#### **COLLECTING SEEDS**

Timing is key. Research when seeds ripen, what mature seeds look like, and whether pods split open naturally. Fruits should be ripe, pods dry on the stalk, and fluffy seeds gathered just before they disperse. Collect only in dry weather, and look for seeds that are hard, dark, and dry.

## Collection methods vary:

- Tip upright pods (e.g., columbine) into a bag
- Clip prickly seedheads and dry before cleaning
- Strip grass seed by hand or with a comb

Collect the seeds in breathable paper bags labeled with species, location, and date. Collect from multiple plants to maintain genetic diversity, and never take more than one-third of any plant's seed.

Tools & Supplies: Gloves • Shears/scissors • Paper bags • Marker • Plastic comb











#### **COLLECT RESPONSIBLY**

In wild populations, follow the **5% rule**: take no more than 1 in 20 seeds, and only from groups with at least 20 plants. Prairies rely on seeds from mature plants to replenish the soil seed bank. Overharvesting can disrupt this process and weaken the long-term vitality of the population.

In gardens or planted prairies, harvest 10–30% of the seed. Collect more conservatively (10–20%) from uncommon species to ensure their continued presence.

#### **GETTING PERMISSION**

Make sure you have permission from the landowner before collecting any native seed. It is **NOT PERMITTED** to collect in national, state or county parks or on conservation lands. Remember that all property has an owner, even roadsides and places we think are vacant. It is our responsibility to confirm ownership and get permission before collecting.

#### **AVOID "HITCHHIKERS"**

Brush off shoes before entering a site to avoid carrying in unwanted seeds. If driving, wash vehicle tires if you've been off-road in natural areas.

# **CLEANING AND STORING**

Dry seeds immediately to prevent mold. Spread them on newspaper or in open paper bags in a cool, dry spot with good airflow, turning them daily.

Once dry, separate seeds from pods or chaff. Some release easily; others (like purple coneflower) take more effort. Removing extra plant material improves storage and planting. The Prairie in Seed by Dave Williams is a useful reference.

Store clean seeds in airtight containers under refrigeration (33–38°F). With proper storage, many remain viable for years.















