Seed Library Toolkit

A simple and practical guide to starting a seed library in your community.

FOOD FROM HOME

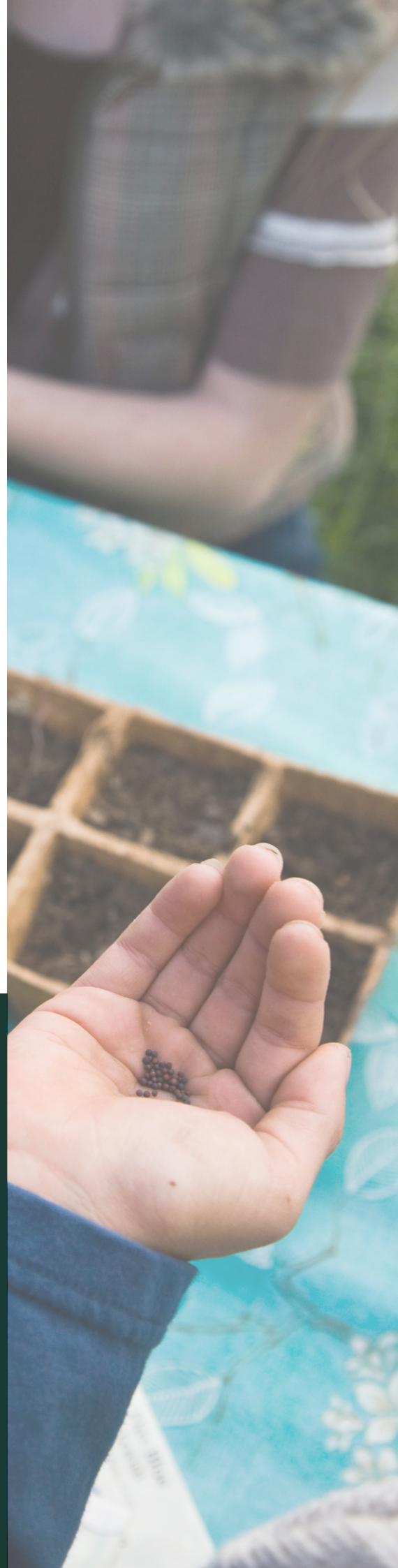# Contents

Acknowledgements

Background

Food from Home is a social marketing campaign that seeks to encourage the health and climate co-benefits of edible gardening in Melbourne's South East.

As part of this campaign, two seed libraries, supported by the City of Casey, were developed and launched in local neighbourhood centres; Berwick Neighbourhood Centre and Endeavour Hills Neighbourhood Centre. This toolkit provides a summary of the key learnings collected while creating these seed libraries, and the development of key tools and resources to help establish a successful seed library.

Development of this toolkit was supported by the City of Casey.

What is a seed library?

A seed library provides a place where community members can **exchange seeds**.

Seed libraries help to promote sustainable gardening practices by supporting the local community to save seeds and grow their own food.

A seed library stocks a variety of seeds which individuals can borrow, allowing them to plant and grow their seeds at home. Once the seeds have ripened and fully matured, seeds can be saved and returned to share with others.

Borrow → Grow → Save → Return & Share
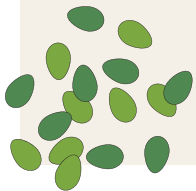
Who is this toolkit for?

- Neighbourhood houses
- Community gardens
- Community groups and organisations
- Schools
- Early year services
- Libraries
- Individuals

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The benefits of seed libraries

Encourages seed saving

Community members become interested and motivated to save and share seeds.

Supports healthy eating

Increases opportunities to grow and eat fruit, vegetable, herbs, legumes and whole grains.

Builds community

Helps to promote social connection, sense of belonging, and community resilience.

Promotes biodiversity

Preserves and promotes diverse food crops for future generations.

Increases food security and sovereignty

Provides free access to seeds as a source of food.

Cost-effective

A low-cost, sustainable solution to increasing local food production.

Planning for a seed library

Things to consider when starting a seed library.

COMMUNITY INTEREST

- Start conversations with the local people that use the space to see if there is community interest in a seed library.

- Identify local people, groups or organisations that might want to get involved.

- Consider if there are already other seed libraries nearby.

LOCATION

- Options for seed library locations:

  - Neighbourhood houses or learning centres
  - Schools, early years services, community hubs
  - Libraries
  - Community gardens or other public spaces

- Consider whether the seed library structure will be inside or outside, taking into account safety & accessibility

🌱 **Learn more** *Resource 1.1 Starting a seed library checklist*

MATERIALS

- Consider your budget when thinking about materials e.g. cabinet or shelving, seeds to help stock the library, envelopes for seeds to go in, etc.

- If your are providing some seeds to start things off, consider:
    - How will these be sourced e.g. community call-out, donations etc.
    - The type of seeds to include e.g. heirloom, hybrid, open-pollinated etc.

DESIGN

- Think about ways you can get the local community involved e.g. volunteers, donations, action groups, partnerships, sponsors etc.

- Some seed libraries can be used by anyone in the community, others require membership, or are only used by a group of people e.g. gardening clubs.

- Consider how the seeds in the library will be organised. Different ways include:

| Alphabetically | Categorical | By season | Traffic light system |

🌱 **Learn more** *Resource 1.2 How to organise a seed library*

EDUCATION & PROMOTION

- Consider running workshops or events about seed saving or how seed libraries work. You could also share resources.

- Think about how you display the information about the seed library e.g. decorate the structure with information, include hard copy flyers inside seed library, a QR code to online information.

- Identify ways to promote the seed library e.g. newsletter, social media, local paper, flyers etc.

🌱 **Learn more** *Resource 1.3 Seed saving: Getting started*

Setting up a seed library

The things you may need to start a seed library.

IDENTIFYING A PHYSICAL SPACE

- Ensure there is enough physical space for the seed library structure.
- Once you have chosen your location, measure the space to ensure the seed library structure is the correct size.
- Consult your local council, landlord, or property owner regarding permits and/or permissions that may be required to proceed with a seed library.

SEEDS

- It may be helpful to have a few seeds to start with to launch your seed library. If you can, select seeds that are ready to plant that season, are suited to your local climate, and that are simple to grow and save e.g. beans, peas, capsicum or lettuce.
- Try asking your local community garden or gardening groups for some seeds to get you started.
- If you must purchase seeds, consider sourcing them either from your local nursery or online. Here are a few online Australian seed stores:
  - Australian Seed
  - Edible Oz
  - Happy Valley Seeds
  - The Seed Collection

Learn more   *Resource 2.1 Seed Saving Glossary*

SEED STORAGE AND PACKAGING

- Once you have sourced your seeds, you will also need to store and package them. You might also like to provide some extra envelopes or packaging for people to take home to return their seeds in.
- Aim to opt for sustainable materials like recycled paper envelopes rather than using single use plastics.

🌱 **Learn more**   *Resource 2.2 How to save and store seeds*

🌱 **Learn more**   *Resource 2.3 DIY seed packets*

SEED LIBRARY SIGNAGE AND INFORMATION

- Clear signage will help people understand where and what the seed library is.
- Instructions on how to use the seed library will be helpful for the community to feel comfortable using it.
- Providing information or resources will ensure community members understand the process. You might like to include a laminated QR code or poster, or small flyers in your seed library.

🌱 **Learn more**   *Resource 2.4 How to use a seed library*

PROMOTIONAL MATERIAL

- In order to increase awareness and participation in the seed library, promotion is an extremely valuable tool. Promotional materials could include posters, flyers, social media tiles or photos.

Case Study

Berwick Neighbourhood Centre Seed Library

In partnership with Berwick Neighbourhood Centre (BNC), Food from Home created a seed library for the Berwick Community Garden.

In order to create this, the community was involved from the start of the project, to input their ideas for how the seed library would look and operate, and to foster community ownership.

In particular, the BNC gardening group were consulted, as well as the members of a local community gardening network group in the City of Casey.

When designing the seed library structures, a call out on a local neighbourhood sustainability group on Facebook was created to encourage the involvement of the local community in the seed library. Through this, a friendly community member volunteered their time to help upcycle the seed library structure.

The process included upcycling an old cabinet bought from Facebook marketplace. The cabinet was transformed into the seed library by adding shelves, a latch and a fresh coat of paint. A small group of City of Casey residents then gathered to decorate the outside of the structure.

Once the seed library structure was made, it was stocked with a variety of seeds from local Australian businesses, and garden group members who had been saving their seeds. It was then placed in the BNC garden, ready for the local community to borrow, grow and save.

To build community knowledge, educational resources were created with topics including how to use the seed library, seed saving, and storing and packaging seeds. In conjunction with this, two educational workshops on seed saving were held.

Case Study (cont.)

Berwick Neighbourhood Centre Seed Library

The first workshop was an in-person workshop for the Endeavour Hills and Berwick community gardening groups. The second workshop was an online webinar which was made available to all members of the public, particularly those in the City of Casey, to generate excitement and awareness of the newly established seed libraries.

To help promote the workshop; flyers, social media posts and Facebook events were created. These were shared via email to key contacts, local council, event websites and local newsletters. Berwick Neighbourhood Centre also assisted with promotional efforts.

The gardening groups are now responsible for maintaining the seed library.

Key learnings:

- **Before creating a seed library, engage the local community and ask them for their input and support in establishing the design and approach.**

- **Build community knowledge, skills and awareness through educational resources and workshops.**

- **Increase awareness of your seed library through platforms such as social media. This will help for increase engagement and participation in the seed library.**

Sustaining a seed library

How to maintain your seed library and ensure its success.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

- Regularly ask users of the seed library for their thoughts and recommendations which could be beneficial in making future improvements.
- Consider monitoring the use of the seed library (formally or informally) to understand trends or patterns of use, and to ensure seed supply and demand is adequate.
- Some seed libraries require seed library users to record what seeds they take and share to track use.

MAINTENANCE AND SUSTAINABILITY

- The development of partnerships with community gardens, community groups and/or local councils can play an important role in ensuring a sustainable seed library.
- Support and/or leadership from a community group or volunteer group can help with any maintenance or safety concerns, checking seed supply, and continued promotion of the seed library, etc.
- When collaborating with others, make sure to establish clear key roles and responsibilities for each individual or group.
- Continue to identify opportunities to build the capacity of your local community to successfully save and share seeds through events, workshops, resources, articles or blog posts.

🌱 **Learn more**   *Resource 3.1 Seed Saving Series*

Seed Library Planning Checklist

A list of questions to consider when thinking about starting a seed library.

Engaging your community
- ☐ Is the local community interested in a seed library?
- ☐ Which local groups or people will be involved?
- ☐ Who else can you reach out to who might get on board to support this?
- ☐ What seed libraries already exist in the area?

Choosing a location for the seed library
- ☐ Do you have a location for the seed library?
- ☐ Will the seed library structure be inside or outside?
- ☐ Is it a safe and accessible location?
- ☐ Do you need a permit or permission?

Sourcing materials
- ☐ Do you have a budget or require funding?
- ☐ Are there people in the local community willing to donate materials?
- ☐ Do you have all the materials needed to build the seed library?
- ☐ Where will you source the initial seeds and envelopes?

Design
- ☐ Can you get the local community involved in the design?
- ☐ How can you involve other community members or groups?
- ☐ How will the seed library be organised and operated?
- ☐ What information will need to be displayed on the seed library?
- ☐ Is your design accessible and inclusive?

Education and promotion
- ☐ How will the local community know about the seed library?
- ☐ How will the local community know how to use the seed library?
- ☐ Will the community need workshops, events or resources on seed saving?
- ☐ How can you help people feel confident when using the seed library?
- ☐ How can you help promote the seed library to your community?

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How to organise a seed library

Different systems and approaches to organising a seed library.

Organising seeds by categories

One way to organise seeds is by categories. This could be as simple as seperate shelves or sections for 'flowers', 'herbs', and 'vegetables'. For more experienced gardeners, you might like to arrange them in common plant families such as 'alliums', 'brassicas', 'cucurbit', 'legumes' and 'nightshades'.

Organising seeds by alphabetical order

The most simple way to organise seeds is in alphabetical order. This might make it simple for beginner gardeners to locate and store seeds within the library.

Organising seeds with the traffic light system

This system rates seeds on their level of difficulty to grow. Seeds in the green section indicate a beginner-friendly, easy to grow crop. The yellow section indicates a moderate level of difficulty, and the red indicates seeds that are harder to grow, or with lower germination rates. This method requires users to have a more advanced understanding of gardening and growing from seed.

Organising seeds by season

Throughout the year, there are certain types of seeds that grow in specific weather conditions. For example, tomatoes generally grow in the summer months. Therefore, this method organises seeds into seasonal categories (summer, autumn, winter, spring) in which certain seeds usually grow in your local climate and conditions.

Getting started: Seed Saving

Seed saving is a cost-effective and environmentally-friendly way to keep growing and improving edible plants that you love to eat!

Simple tips for saving seeds

- Choose seeds from the healthiest and strongest plants
- Try to save organic, heirloom, and open-pollinated seed varieties
- Dry-seeded crops can be the easiest to save
- Make sure to label your seeds with the type, date and location grown
- Store your seeds in a cool, dry and dark place

What you'll need to get started

- Scissors or pocket knife
- Paper envelopes
- Pen or marker
- Mason jars
- Plastic or metal bowl
- Sieve
- Paper towel or coffee filters

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Seed Saving Glossary

A basic guide to commonly used seed-related terminology

Cross-pollinated seeds: Seeds that have come from two plants of the same type but different varieties, resulting in hybrid seeds

Fermentation: A chemical change that can occur in plants and increase the likelihood of germination

Fertilization: A process where male and female parts of a plant fuse together to form a zygote (fertilized egg)

Germination: The process where a seed starts to grow into a seedling

GMO (genetically modified organism) seed: A seed where the DNA is altered in order to produce a trait that is desirable

Heirloom seeds: Seeds that have been passed down through generations of a plant due to positive characteristics such as healthiness, flavour, productivity, or adaptability.

Hybrid seed: A seed that has been cross-pollinated in order to produce the best features from the chosen varieties

Open pollinated: Seeds that produce an identical copy of the parent plant via natural pollination such as insects, wind or rain

Pollination: The process that causes plants to reproduce through the transfer of pollen from the male to female parts of a plant

Self-pollinated seeds: A type of pollination between male and female flower parts contained within the same flower or separate flowers on the same plant.
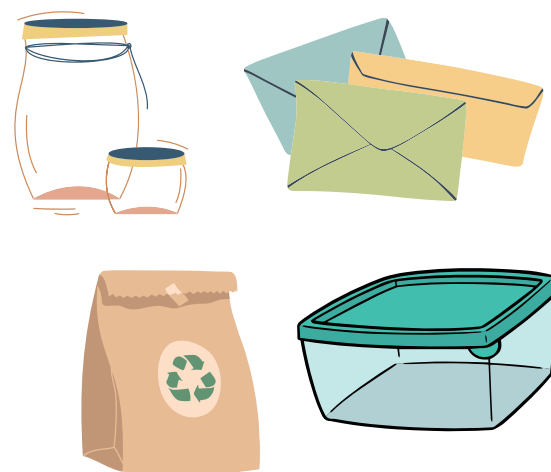
How to package and store seeds

Some simple tips and ideas for packaging and storing your seeds.

Packaging seeds

Seeds can be packaged in clean:

- Jars
- Sealable bags
- Paper bags
- Envelopes
- Containers

Once packaged, ensure that seeds are clearly labelled with the following information:

- Type of seed
- The date it was saved
- Where is was grown (e.g. Doveton, Dandenong)
- Any other relevant information about the seed or plant

Storing seeds

To maintain your high quality seeds, make sure your seeds are stored in a cool, dark and dry place.
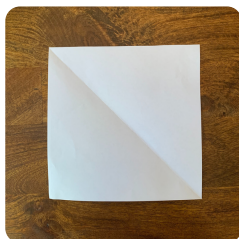
- Short-term storage: packaged seeds can be stored in a drawer or cupboard

- Long-term storage: store packaged seeds in the fridge

Now your seeds are ready to be returned to the seed libraries, available for the next person to grow!

DIY seed packets

*Here is a simple, free and sustainable way to package
your own seed packets at home!*

1. Start with a square piece of paper - feel free to reuse
   newspapers or magazines to make it more sustainable!

2. Fold the paper diagonally into a triangle, the long side should
   be facing you.

3. Now fold the bottom right corner of your triangle towards the
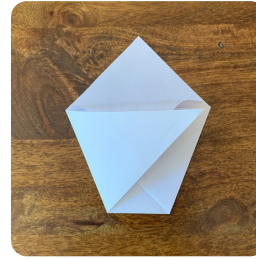   opposite side, you should see that there is a straight edge on
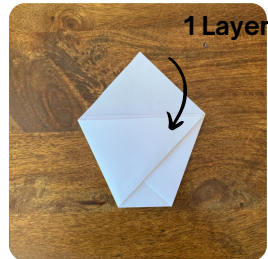   the top.

4. Repeat Step 3 on the other side.

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5. You will be able to see two triangles at the top, fold and tuck the first triangle into the triangular pocket made by Step 3 and 4.
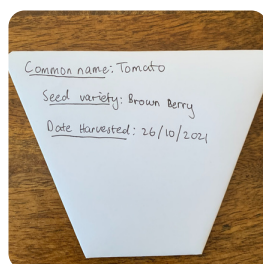

6. Now you can fill your envelope with seeds! To close, tuck the second triangle following the same method as Step 5.

7. Label the envelope, this should include:
   - Common name of seed
   - Seed variety
   - Date that the seeds were harvested
   - The area or growing region seeds were harvested
   - Any additional notes

How to use a seed library

Borrow seeds
- Visit your local seed library
- Borrow seeds of your choice to take home and grow

Grow seeds
- Plant and grow seeds at home
- Enjoy your freshly picked fruits and vegetables!

Save seeds
- Save some seeds from the healthiest plant for next season
- Before returning some of your seeds, make sure to fill out the details (type of seed, when it was saved) on the packet

Return and share seeds
- Return your saved seeds to your local seed library
- Your seeds can now be shared and grown by other community members!

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Saving Broad Bean Seeds

1. These seeds are found within the pods of the broad bean.

2. Before picking, leave some beans on the plant to dry.

3. Once the beans are dry and turn brown, it is ready to be picked.

4. Take seeds out of their pods when they feel firm and leathery, you will also be able to see the beans swell in the pods.

5. Get rid of any beans that have been damaged.

6. Leave beans out to dry close to a windowsill near sun for 7-10 days.

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For more resources, visit: www.foodfromhome.org/resources/

Saving Tomato Seeds

1. Once ripe, cut open the tomato and squeeze seeds out

2. Optional: Place seeds in a jar with water to ferment.
   - This is helpful if you want healthy, high quality tomato seeds
   - This also boosts the likelihood of seed growth as it gets rid of the part in the tomato that prevents germination

3. Wash in a sieve to separate the flesh from the seed.

4. Rinse and dry out seeds on a paper towel/plate for about a week.

5. Package and store seeds when dry.

TIP: To increase the likelihood of germination, ferment tomato seeds by placing them into a jar with water. After 5-7 days, rinse and dry seeds with more water to remove mould. Repeat until there is no longer any mould left and the water is clear.

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Saving Basil Seeds

1. Once you can see a tall stem and flowers at the top of your basil plant, cut the stem below the flowers.

2. Dry the flowers near a window or door to ensure good air circulation.

3. When the dried basil flowers are able to be crumbled, it is time to remove the seeds.

4. There are two ways basil seeds can be collected, you can:
   - Use a sieve to reveal seeds
   - Rub the flower between your fingers to reveal seeds

5. Package and store seeds when dry

TIP: Basil can cross pollinate so be sure to keep varieties of this plant separate from others in your garden

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For more resources, visit: www.foodfromhome.org/resources/

Saving Capsicum Seeds

1. When the capsicum is fully ripe and starts to wrinkle, it is ready to be picked.

2. Cut the capsicum open and carefully remove the seeds.

3. <u>Optional:</u> To check which seeds will germinate, place the seeds in cold water for a minute
   - Seeds at the bottom will have an increased likelihood of germination
   - Seeds at the top will not germinate

4. Spread seeds out on a plate in a location close to the sun and leave to dry.

5. Once seeds are dried, you will hear a "crack" sound when it is broken.

6. Package and store seeds when dry.

TIP: This process is the same for saving chilli seeds! Ensure that capsicum and chilli are not planted next to each other, otherwise your capsicum may cross-breed and turn hot!

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For more resources, visit: www.foodfromhome.org/resources/

Saving lettuce seeds

1. The lettuce goes to seed when it 'bolts'.
   - This will happen when the plant shifts from producing lettuce leaves and starts growing a stalk with flowers,

2. The lettuce seeds are found within the flowers and are ready to collect when the flowers are fluffy and dry.

3. There are many ways to collect these seeds:
   - Shake the flower heads over a bag and collect fallen seeds.
   - Remove the stalk and shake it over a bucket to collect the seeds.
   - Pick the flowers and rub them between your fingers to release.

4. Once the seeds have been collected, leave them out to dry for a few days.

5. Package and store seeds when dry.