



# Seeds of Diversity Canada

## Our Mission

**The Problem:** The foundation of our food system – the plant gene pool – is eroding quickly. For countless generations, farmers and gardeners selected and perpetuated thousands of varieties of plants for food, clothing, and medicine. But concentration of the agriculture and horticulture industries in the past century so eroded the plant gene pool that over 75% of all traditional crop varieties are now extinct, and today most of the remaining varieties are endangered.

**Our Vision:** A world in which all people recognize their own essential, personal need for sustainable agriculture and food production, and live the tradition of caring for the biodiversity of the world's cultivated plants.

**Our Mission:** To promote the conservation and use of heritage and endangered food plants, to preserve knowledge of traditional seed saving and agricultural practices, and to encourage people to actively engage in protecting the diverse gene pool of plants that sustain human civilization.

**Seeds of Diversity Canada** is a charitable organization working to save Canada's endangered horticultural and agricultural heritage. For over 20 years, we have helped gardeners and farmers to explore, conserve, and use the legacy of Canadian cultivated plants that have been discovered here, developed here, and grown here for the improvement of our lives. The seeds we save are a living inheritance for future generations, and the members who learn to grow and save seeds are reconnected to an ancient tradition of stewardship, nurturing our diverse genetic and cultural heritage.

Our core activity is the Seed Exchange – a living gene bank, a network of people who collect, conserve, and share open-pollinated heirloom vegetables, fruits, grains, herbs, and flowers. We build upon this network to support the development of markets for heritage produce and seeds, and to educate others about the value of genetic and cultural diversity. We support people and community groups who want to learn how to save seeds by providing technical and teaching materials. Our network is strengthened by working in partnership with government and other community groups across the country.

Our successes are measured by our excellent programs and projects, by the plants we have saved, by the enrichment of our members' lives, by the extent to which the community garden movement has adopted heritage seeds, and, ultimately, by our ability to reinvigorate a way of life that includes a living tradition of seed saving.

Can our seeds, like endangered animals reintroduced from zoos into the wild, move from life support systems in sterile gene banks and become part of everyday life again? Can the gentle process of accidental discovery of new varieties, the evolution of cultivars adapted to local climates, soils, and cultures, become a living process again? Today we are a long way from such a vision.

Horticultural, agricultural, heritage, multicultural, environmental, and social service communities look to us for expertise in plant diversity, food security, and garden/farm heritage. With over 1400 members from coast to coast, members in every province, complete services in both of Canada's official languages and strong partners in government, business, and non-profit sectors, we are ideally positioned to realize our bold vision.



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Canada is rich in agricultural and horticultural resources and has a strong heritage of gardening traditions in many diverse regions. Unfortunately, our access to diverse Canadian plant varieties has diminished severely in recent decades. Thousands of plant varieties are suited for Canadian gardens, but only a handful are available to most growers. Mass marketing and consolidation of the seed and plant nursery industries have relegated most of our traditional seeds and plants to a few private and government collections, inaccessible to most people. Only about one in three traditional Canadian garden plants are available commercially. Worse still, over three-quarters of them are so poorly collected that they are in constant danger of extinction.

#### **Diversity Brings Security**

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization has declared that the number 1 danger to world food security is the erosion of genetic diversity in food crops, and that the task of conservation is so great that it is essential for citizens' groups to participate. Seeds of Diversity Canada is a rallying ground for Canadians to collect rare plants, to conserve them in backyard gardens, and to exchange and share them through our network with other backyard conservators, institutional collectors, and public gene banks.

#### **Diversity Brings Opportunity**

Many Canadian gardeners and niche market farmers have no access to the plant varieties that best fit their needs. Mass-marketed plants are intended to grow adequately in most places, but the best varieties for any region are those that are adapted to that region. For all our technical advances during the past century, gardeners and farmers have a poorer selection of plants suited to their local growing conditions than they did 100 years ago.

Seeds of Diversity Canada helps people access rare, yet well-adapted, plant varieties, and teaches the fundamentals of seed production so that people can multiply their seeds for their own use and for their community. We help people start “micro” seed companies to serve the specific horticultural needs of their regions. We empower home gardeners, community gardeners, and niche farmers to gain control of their seeds, their plants, and their gardens. With the right seeds, they have more reliable and nutritious harvests of locally-grown food, earn more money, and even help to conserve part of our precious horticultural biodiversity.

#### **Diversity Is Our Heritage**

Communities that were founded on strong traditions of farming and gardening are becoming detached from that heritage. Most people have lost the knowledge to grow plants, to save seeds, and to feed themselves. In some way, many people want to reconnect with their grandparents' knowledge and lifestyles, even just recreationally.

The traditional “heritage plants” that founded early Canadian communities have become very difficult to find. First Nations communities have lost many of their original plants and yearn to regain them. Immigrant communities have introduced a wealth of diverse plants into Canada during the past few centuries, but many have lost their own supplies of seeds and do not know where to find them again.

Seeds of Diversity Canada helps people of all backgrounds to learn about their horticultural heritage and to reclaim access to their ancestral plants. Our network of gardeners maintains and shares the largest selection of heritage garden seeds in Canada. We work with heritage sites across the country to present and interpret Canada's gardening and farming past, and to help restore heritage gardens with historically correct plant material. Many Canadians came from a farming ancestry – we are working to save their heritage.

**Support Seeds of Diversity – Support gardeners conserving endangered plants**  
**[www.seeds.ca](http://www.seeds.ca)**