



## Everyone Loves Seeds!

Wed, 01/05/2011 - 06:56 -- Aaron Burmeister

Well, maybe not everyone. I can think of a few exceptions. I bet you can too. Jack's mother, for instance. Remember how she tossed those magic beans right out the window? Good thing she was a composter, or there wouldn't have been much of a story to tell. And some seed-dislike is contextual. I can remember a time when my parents made me eat peas. I wasn't much of a seed-lover then. And now as an adult, even when I'm working with the "seedies" at [Seed Savers Exchange](#) [1], there are times when my own seed-love is tested. Have you ever tried counting or doing anything else on a smooth lab surface with turnip seeds? The tiny and nearly perfectly spherical little guys roll all over the place as if they have minds and plans of their own. I'll confess that this type of work sometimes challenges my commitment to my relationship with seeds.

Some coworkers and I were wondering about the universality of seed-love as we staffed our Seed Savers promotional/interpretive booth at a recent green expo. We noticed how everyone who stopped to talk with us exhibited seed-love in some way. Even those who may not otherwise have stopped were drawn in by seed packets and little piles of loose seed that we had arranged on one of the tables. I don't think it's a stretch to say that the seeds prompted conversations and even story-telling. Kids especially couldn't resist touching the seeds and sorting them by their colors and shapes.

What is it about seeds that gives them this seemingly universal appeal?

We could talk about the fascinating biology of seeds – how a seed is a fertilized and ripened ovule of a parent plant organism. And how within each seed there is actually a very small plant structure, suspended in a genetically programmed dormancy. We could even dissect the seed's anatomy into its component parts – radicle and hypocotyl, epicotyl and cotyledon, endosperm and seed coat. But this doesn't sound like the language of love. At least not to me.

Why do we love seeds then? I've got some theories.

I think most of us attach memories to seeds. Good memories. Fond memories. Seeds may remind you of events, experiences, places, and persons. Seeds may vivify the memory of your first gardening experience, which was most likely not a solitary one. And that memory is not just about gardening, is it. It's about your relationship with some elder – a parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle, or some other positive, mature influence.

Seeds are also embodiments of larger concepts, whether we consciously realize it or not. Think of the ways in which seeds can catalyze brief or ruminating reflections on hope, promise, mystery, optimism, abundance, rebirth, or even justice. It's more than just germplasm in there. A seed is a living demonstration of anything for which we are hopeful but which, in its current form, is not yet fully visible.

Seeds are tactile. As we grow older we are conditioned to appreciate things without having to touch them. Kids are always a good measure of those things which most strongly tempt us to touch. To have a conversation with a kid about seeds without giving her the opportunity to touch them is a pointless torture.

Fava bean seeds are the grand champions of tactile appeal.

Seeds are language and metaphor. Even those who don't garden still use seeds on a regular basis. We all use expressions like "plant the seed." Anytime we use the word "sow" in a non-literal way, we're using seeds as metaphor. I think that the metaphorical use of seed deepens our relationship with the actual object.



[2]

In my work for [Seed Savers Exchange](#) [1], I go from actual seed to metaphor and back again countless times in one day. I think I'm fortunate to have a job that works with one object on a number of different levels comprising physical reality and metaphor.

Seed Savers is an organization that helps people realize the depth of their connection with seeds. We affirm personal relationships with seeds. If seeds were only fertilized, ripened ovules, there would be no need for an organization like ours. But people love seeds. We attach significances and meanings to seeds. They become symbols of very human (as opposed to merely botanical) things. Seeds can come to represent and embody relationships that you have to others as well as define your place in history and culture. When my organization facilitates the dissemination (there it is again) and preservation of some family's heirloom vegetable, we're not just shuffling seeds around or hoarding them in our freezers. We're affirming and invigorating cultural traditions and even personal relationships.

Go ahead and express your seed-love. Save seeds!

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*[Seed Savers Exchange](#)[1] is a non-profit, member supported organization that saves and shares the heirloom seeds of our garden heritage, forming a living legacy that can be passed down through generations. The mission of SSE is to save North America's diverse, but endangered, garden heritage for future generations by building a network of people committed to collecting, conserving and sharing heirloom seeds and plants, while educating people about the value of genetic and cultural diversity.*

Image (optional):

