Seed Saving

Know whether your parent plant is a hybrid or open-pollinated variety.

Hybrids, which are created by crossing plants of two different varieties, generally do not produce offspring with the same traits as the parent plant. Seeds saved from open-pollinated varieties, on the other hand, will produce plants identical to the parent. Seed Savers Exchange offers only open-pollinated varieties through its online and print catalog and on the Exchange, its gardener-to-gardener seed swap.

So, what are open-pollinated varieties, and what is their lifespan? Open-pollinated varieties are like dog breeds; they will retain their distinct characteristics if they are mated with the same breed. This means, with a little care and planning, the seeds you produce will be true-to-type, keeping their distinct traits generation after generation if they do not cross-pollinate with other varieties of the same species.

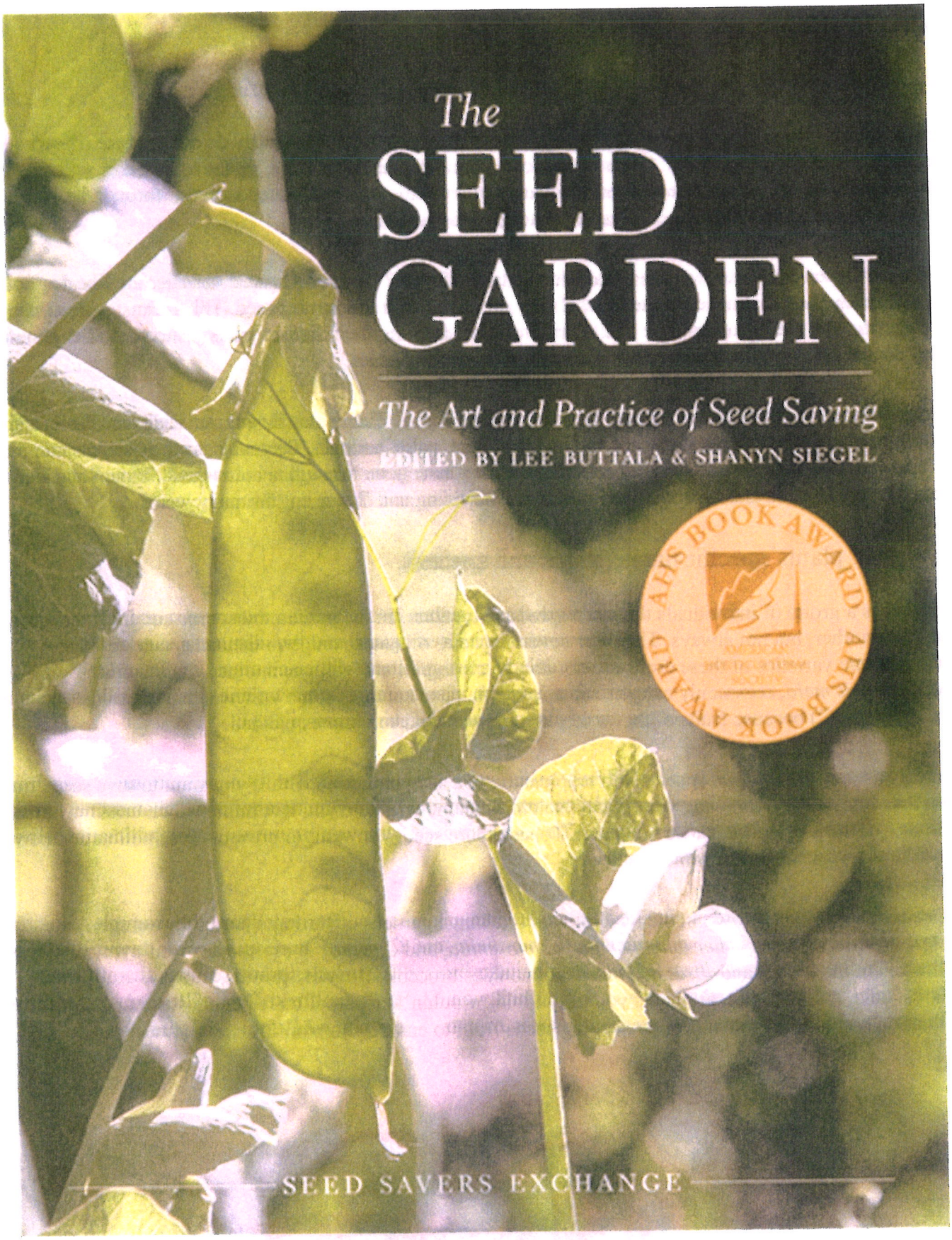
Open-pollinated varieties can be annual, biennial, and perennial. Plants that flower, set seed, and die in a single growing season—like lettuce, tomatoes, and peppers—are called annuals. Biennials, such as carrots and onions, don't flower until their second growing season after they have gone through a cold period. Some long-lived plants, like apple trees and asparagus, are perennial, surviving and flowering for many years.

Know your plants' specific name (genus and species).

A species is a group of individuals that can reproduce together. In the garden, most crops are different species from one another, but not always. There are several species of squash and two distinct species of kale—meaning some varieties of these crops are not able to cross-pollinate with each other. On the other hand, *Cucumis melo*, commonly categorized as a melon, also contains some varieties that are sold as cucumbers (like 'Armenian') because fruits of the variety are unsweet and sometimes pickled.

Planting just one variety in a species will help ensure you save pure seed. But if you want to save seeds from more than one variety, knowing your plants' scientific name will help you determine which ones may cross-pollinate (or transfer pollen between plants). To save pure seed, you want to prevent cross-pollination between two different varieties in the same species.

The squash commonly grown in the Seed Savers Exchange gardens at Heritage Farm, for example, could fall into one of three species: *Cucurbita maxima*, *C. moschata*, and *C. pepo*. These species won't typically cross-pollinate. On the other hand, *Brassica oleracea* includes broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, collards, kale, and kohlrabi, all plants you might think wouldn't cross-pollinate but do. Read up on the cross-pollination habits of the plants you are saving seeds from to ensure you won't run into issues.



The Seed Garden: The Art and Practice of Seed Saving is filled with advice for the home gardener and the more seasoned horticulturist alike and provides straightforward instructions on how to collect and save seed from your favorite heirloom and open-pollinated plants.