

# Seed exchange etiquette

<http://westhawaii.com/sections/news/local-features/seed-exchange-etiquette.html>

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Hawaii is known as a melting pot for cultures, people and food. As each immigrant population made its way to Hawaii's shores, they brought their own seeds and plants. These plants were grown in their gardens and farms, and allowed to naturalize into the landscape. Today, we recognize many of these plants — breadfruit, mangoes, citrus, banana, vegetables — and many of the food and landscape plants we use today.

These earlier farmers and gardeners saved seeds from their best varieties to continue that lineage in Hawaii. From these early periods, it was common to exchange seeds with neighbors, relatives and co-workers. Whether it was in an ahupuaa, plantation camp or developing town, seeds exchanged hands to grow food for survival.

While personal seed exchanges still occur, there is a general decline in the practice. In its place are organized seed exchanges that are becoming more common in Hawaii and the United States. Also contributing to the decline of personal seed exchanges is that many individuals are choosing to purchase seeds from local retail outlets and online sources. Seed exchanges have even taken root online with blogs and websites offering many types of seeds and plants.

If you have been to a seed exchange, you know some of the types and conditions of seeds you find at the event. I like to believe in the old saying "do unto others as you wish them to do unto you." If you want to receive good quality seeds, you should make it a point to bring good quality seeds to the exchange. Listed below are some things I look for in seeds to add to my collection:

Use of the common name is great for commonly grown plants. The scientific name is a great addition to plants that are not widely grown. This allows the recipient to do an online search for more information on the plant. If the cultivar or variety name is known, provide that information. If it has a unique history or story, providing that bit of information can open the door to countless other stories. It can make that variety that much more precious to the new recipient.

Perhaps the most important aspect I look for is the overall quality of the seeds. You can grow a tomato, lettuce or pumpkin without knowing its true name, but you can't grow them if the seeds don't germinate or disease and insects kill the plants before harvest or the next seed collection. Seed collecting for future plantings should be a planned event, not an afterthought. The healthiest plants normally produce the most vigorous seeds. Proper spacing will allow good air flow around your plants reducing the incidence of diseases. Check seeds for insect infestation. Seed weevils and beetles are constant threats for infesting your garden or the garden that receives your infested seeds.

Learn to clean your seeds properly so they do not contain extra material, such as dried fruit wall or gel. Dry your seeds properly so they store well without molding or rotting. Seeds that stick together are hard to work with and may provide a media on which disease may hitchhike into your garden.

When exchanging seeds of endangered or threatened plants, make sure they originated from domesticated sources and not those collected from wild growing plants. It's great to help repopulate an endangered species, but not at the expense of wild-grown plants.

Exchanging invasive species is also a major concern at seed exchanges, especially from online sources where seeds may originate from any part of the world. Many invasive plants in Hawaii were initially introduced as ornamental or food crop plants.

If you want to practice your seed exchange etiquette, your chance arrives from 3 to 5 p.m. Nov. 2 at the 10th annual Hawaii Island Westside Seed Exchange at the Amy B.H. Greenwell Ethnobotanical Garden in Captain Cook.

For more information on seeds and other gardening topics, visit [ctahr.hawaii.edu/Site/Info.aspx](http://ctahr.hawaii.edu/Site/Info.aspx) or any of the local Cooperative Extension Service offices.

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