



Saving Seeds

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Paul Massey will share his expertise at a seed-saving workshop. Photo courtesy of Paul Massey

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"I pretty much think saving seed is the most important thing we can do on the planet," says Paul Massey, founder of Regenerations Botanical Garden in Kilauea. "We're at a tipping point, where we still have an amazing amount of plant diversity, but it's disappearing rapidly."

Massey will be one of the speakers at a two-day workshop aimed at teaching folks how to save seeds. The deadline to register, and apply for youth scholarships, is Thursday, Oct. 20. The workshop, set for Nov. 6 at Kaua`i Community College and Nov. 7 on the North Shore is intended to give farmers and gardeners a practical working knowledge of seed growing, botany and biology, selection, harvesting, cleaning, and saving. Each workshop will include hands-on fieldwork.

It's the first in a statewide series presented by the Hawai`i State Public Seed Initiative.

Large corporations have bought out many seed suppliers; and this consolidation of seed, combined with the loss of knowledge of seed-saving practices, has resulted in the disappearance of thousands of varieties of heirloom, open-pollinated seeds.

A 1983 study conducted by the Rural Advancement Foundation surveyed 66 crops and found that 93 percent of varieties are extinct. More than 300 varieties of corn existed 80 years ago; now only 12 varieties remain. Tomato varieties have dwindled from 408 to 79; peas from 408 to 25 — and the list goes on.

Protecting diversity isn't the only plus to saving seeds. "The more we have locally adapted seed, the less input and labor it takes to harvest a yield from the plants that feed us," Massey says.

He sees the workshop as a way of "sharing that excitement, sharing that simple message that we actually could look at the possibility that we could feed ourselves. We can do it, but it will take a lot of people on island doing it. We need to really brush up on our skills. We are not ready to have a full-fledged agricultural expression next week, but it's time now, while we have this buffer, to learn how to do this work."

Massey even thinks there's potential for an organic seed industry on Kaua'i, for all the same reasons that Dow, Pioneer and the other seed companies are drawn here: a year-round growing cycle and abundant sunshine and water.

The Sunday workshop runs from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and includes sessions on "History of Seed in Hawai'i and the Global Perspective on Seed," presented by Dr. Hector Valenzuela with the University of Hawai'i College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources (CTAHR); and "Seed Production Basics — Botany and Biology," by Massey and Dr. Russell Nagata, the CTAHR extension services administrator for Hawai'i County.

Nagata and Massey also will discuss "Maintaining Crop Genetics: Cultivation, Selection, Harvesting, and Storage of Seed." Dimi Rivera and Chris Kobayashi of Wai'oli Farm in Hanalei, and Glenn Teves of the CTAHR extension office, on Moloka'i, will address kalo propagation and production.

Other presenters include Jill Richardson of Regenerations Botanical Garden and Big Island coffee farmer Nancy Redfeather, coordinator of The Kohala Center's Hawai'i Public Seed Initiative.

On Monday morning, the workshop will move to Regenerations Garden in Kilauea, where Dr. Nagata will hone participants' knowledge of growing, selecting and saving lettuce seed, and Teves will share his expertise on growing tomatoes to seed. In the afternoon, the group will travel to Wai'oli Farm in Hanalei to discuss kalo production with Rivera and Kobayashi.

The workshop is funded by the Ceres Foundation, and the fee is \$50 for both days, including lunches by Chef Keli Ranke, an optional farm tour on Tuesday, Nov. 8, and the Seed Basics Manual—Year 1. Five full scholarships will be offered to Kaua'i youth (ages 14–21) who interested in agriculture.

To register, apply for scholarships and view the full agenda, visit <http://kohalacenter.org/publicseedinitiative/about.html>. Or contact Jill Richardson at jr@ribg.org or 652-4118. Pre-registration and pre-payment are required to have lunch on both days and to receive the Seed Manual.