



Annual Report 2022

Seeds

	Member Seed Exchange	Seeds of Diversity Seed Library	Canadian Seed Catalogue Index
Species	196	80	91
Varieties	2396	3032	7759
Flowers	139	23	15
Fruit	33	50	26
Grains	29	97	355
Herbs	62	3	
Vegetables	2133	2959	7363

Seeds that our members offer to each other

Seeds that we back up to ensure future supply

Seeds sold by Canadian garden seed companies

Members

Province	Members
AB	128
BC	285
MB	34
NB	41
NL	18
NS	94
ON	762
PE	16
QC	347
SK	76
YT	6
NT	1
USA	25
Total	1833

The biggest news of 2022 is that membership is now free. After consultation with our members last year, we removed the \$35 fee to encourage greater participation by the wide seed saving community that had sometimes seen that as a barrier, and encouraged our supporters to continue to keep our programs alive through donations.

You responded enthusiastically: our membership numbers are higher than they have been in decades, participation in programs such as our Member Seed Exchange dramatically increased during the past year, and your generosity as donors has continued to keep our programs well funded and viable.

Several members expressed concern that “free membership should not come cheaply”, meaning that they did not want to see Seeds of Diversity’s capacities diminished or diluted by a flood of new members who did not hold the same dedication to quality and purpose. Our board of directors shared that concern, and took it seriously. We want our seed exchange to be a way for people to conserve rare seed varieties, instead of just a place to exchange cheap seeds.

When we promote membership, therefore, we focus on the value of joining a group of seed savers, to learn, to save and share seeds, and to meet others concerned about preserving food biodiversity. With that message, not merely a promotion of the seed exchange itself, we are aiming to invite Canada’s seed savers (and those interested in learning) to become members for mutual benefit.

So far, the increase in our membership numbers has seemed to be accompanied by an increase in seeds offered through the seed exchange, and new members seem to be genuinely interested in our purpose as a seed saving organization.

Seed Library Collection Re-organized and Moved

Since 2007 we have managed a formal collection of seeds; a back up of the varieties that our members circulate in the seed exchange, as well as varieties that have been dropped from seed catalogues, and obtained from other seed libraries and seed banks.

There are now thousands of samples of seeds in the collection. Some are kept in short-term storage, in an air-conditioned room adjacent to our office. They will only remain viable for a limited time, but they are easily accessible and intended to be circulated to growers, events, and other seed libraries. Others are stored in freezers, well-dried for the long term, as backups in case the short-term seeds run out or cannot be regrown quickly enough.

During the 15 years that we operated this collection, our back up collection was kept in a large freezer at the Everdale farm near Hillsburgh Ontario. We are grateful to Everdale for its generosity and support, but our arrangement was planned to end in 2021, when we intended all along to move the seeds to a different home. We found that new home in a set of freezers at Fertile Ground farm near St Agatha Ontario, which is a very convenient location.

During the winter and spring of 2022 Aileen Verdun and Angie Koch, our Seed Library coordinators, unpacked all 290 jars of our back-up collection, containing 2360 packets of seeds, re-inventoried and re-packed them to confirm their contents, and re-dried them for continued frozen storage.

In practice, we do not use our back up collection often, which is a good sign that the short-term portion of the collection is being used properly. However, a few times in recent years we have needed a back up sample, and it has been a delight to find that those seeds were still viable after many years of storage. Now, it is assuring to know that the back-up collection is accurately inventoried, and stored safely until the next time we might need it.

We have also begun the process of re-inventorying and germination-testing the older samples in our short-term collection. Viable seeds will be sent to member seed growers to produce fresh samples, and surplus seeds will be available at Seedy Saturday/Sunday events, and through our member seed exchange.

Community Seed Grow-outs

Although it is true that Seeds of Diversity's purpose is to grow rare seeds, our primary goal is actually to grow more seed savers! We rely on experienced seed savers to help grow out the rare seeds in our collection, but ideally we would not even need a collection if there were more seed savers growing and perpetuating all our seed varieties in the first place.

The best way for a beginning seed saver to find a meaningful project is to take our "Grow One Rare Variety" challenge. Find a variety that is only available from one or two sources, get some seeds from them, learn to save the seeds, and re-offer them through the Member Seed Exchange. If everyone did that for just one rare variety, there would be no rare varieties!

For members who want to be more connected to our seed collection, but not quite at a point where they feel able to grow high-quality seeds for it, we offer "Save an Old Bean Seed" and "Save an Old Tomato Seed" programs. When a seed sample in our collection is duplicated by others, and beginning to lose viability, we don't need to keep it anymore but it seems a shame to waste it. Instead, we offer those seeds to any members who want to

grow them out. The seeds might not all germinate, but they will be a variety from our collection that is difficult to find elsewhere, so they are worth growing and saving. We encourage members to offer their saved seeds through the Member Seed Exchange, and at local seed swaps, to make those varieties available to other gardeners too.

One of our ongoing projects for members is our “Tall-bearing Ground Cherry” participatory breeding project. For the past few years, we have offered seeds of a strain of ground cherries (*Physalis pruinosa*) that is being selected for upright growth habit to make it easier to harvest, and for good flavour. Members learn how to select the plants that show the desired traits, and save seeds from those. We mix everyone’s saved seeds together and send them back out for further “in-situ” selection and improvement each year. It is a work in progress, and we thank everyone who has participated so far.

Our garlic collection, grown in partnership with a food bank and social service agency that donates garden space for us, now has 68 varieties in good health. Our goal is to preserve and offer these varieties to gardeners across the country, and to encourage others to multiply and share them. We’ve seen more garlic diversity in gardens, farms, seed exchanges, and markets since we started this program, so hopefully we’ve helped make that happen. We cannot use re-grown garlic from other growers, to prevent disease and pest organisms affecting the collection, so instead we harvest bulbils from the mature garlic scapes and offer them to help gardeners diversify their garlic. Bulbils are much less likely to contain insect pests and soil-borne disease organisms than bulbs are, and they’re much more economical to ship.

Seedy Saturdays and Seedy Sundays

For three decades, Seedy Saturdays and Seedy Sundays have been one of the most effective ways for us to promote Seeds of Diversity’s work, to meet new members in communities across the country, and to distribute surplus seeds from our national Seed Library collection. Over 170 of these events occurred across the country in 2019, and we have great hopes for their return in 2023.

These events have been a significant source of Seeds of Diversity’s revenue through direct fundraising, as well as a major driver of online sales of books, memberships, and donations. Our volunteers at Seedy Saturdays/Sundays should know that their work translates into hundreds of online contributions after the events.

It goes without saying that 2020-2022 were not the best years for Seedy Saturdays/Sundays, but we are proud to have supported about 50 events through those years when they shifted to online formats.

Indications for 2023 are that there is abundant interest in returning to in-person events, and community organizers are already making preparations. However, we are also aware that there will be challenges to return to the format that we had all been used to. Some event organizers have retired, and their successors have never planned an in-person Seedy Saturday/Sunday. Some community groups have lost the connections with local exhibitors and vendors that they previously had renewed annually.

Similar to the way that we supported Seedy Saturday/Sunday organizers in 2021-2022, we will host a series of networking meetings to help planners from many communities meet, discuss their plans for 2023, and learn from each other. As well, we will offer another set of online presentations to provide content for virtual/hybrid events. As always, we will promote all Seedy Saturday/Sunday events on our web site and through our social media.

Seeds of Diversity shares the challenge of returning to in-person events, since our own volunteer relationships and promotional materials are now three years out of date. If you would like to help Seeds of Diversity’s

promotion at a local event next year, please let us know. There are several ways that you can assist, big and small.

Look for Seedy Saturdays and Seedy Sundays in the new year at www.seeds.ca/events !

Youth In Food Systems, Career Interview Series

With support from the Gay Lea Foundation we are producing a series of youth-developed video interviews with food systems leaders to inspire high school students to learn about careers in Canada's future sustainable food system. One out of eight Canadians work in the food system, and a sustainability mindset should start early.

You can see our youth volunteers' amazing work at www.YouthInFoodSystems.ca

Youth In Food Systems, Youth-led Media

To engage thinking and learning about sustainable food, we give high school youth the tools to research and produce podcasts, videos, blog posts, infographics, and other digital media to inform their peers about the food issues that concern them. Mentors advise on content curation and provide coaching on format and fact-checking, but youth are free to explore the food sustainability subjects that they care about most.

Youth In Food Systems, Youth Produce Markets

Since 2018 we have facilitated a project in which youth grow produce in local community gardens and plan, promote, and operate a series of pop-up markets in food-insecure neighbourhoods. Currently, this program only operates in Waterloo Region, Ontario since it is local to our office and staff team, but we encourage local agencies in other municipalities to extend the idea elsewhere.

School Food Gardens

Our initial program for school garden education in 2017 created food gardens and education programs at 45 schools in Waterloo Region, Ontario, and it still remains a part of our youth program. Due to its physical nature it is difficult to expand this program beyond its original boundary, but we encourage agencies in other municipalities to re-use our resources.

Digital Media

We produce an email newsletter that is approximately monthly, in English and French, sent to about 12000 subscribers. Members are automatically included unless they unsubscribe. Topics include gardening and seed-saving techniques, news about events and programs, pollinator awareness, current issues in sustainable food, and profiles of people and projects of interest to our community of members.

Our social media features frequent (at least weekly) updates, news, reminders about seasonal tasks in the garden, and what's happening in our community of gardeners and seed savers.

The Bauta Family Initiative on Canadian Seed Security

Seeds of Diversity is proud to be a partner in The Bauta Family Initiative on Canadian Seed Security, which leads training programs for seed producers, participatory plant breeding, and analysis of seed policy. The program is operated by SeedChange in partnership with several organizations across Canada including Seeds of Diversity.

Find out more at www.seedsecurity.ca

Fundraising

In addition to charitable donations from over 300 individuals, Seeds of Diversity was fortunate this year to have the support of the following funders :

- The Bauta Family Initiative on Canadian Seed Security
- The Weston Family Foundation
- Ontario Trillium Foundation
- Peterborough K.M. Hunter Foundation
- Gay Lea Foundation
- Waterloo Region Community Foundation
- Canada Summer Jobs

Volunteers

Finally, our deepest thanks to all of you who give your time to help Seeds of Diversity to save food biodiversity and heritage, and to give opportunities to gardeners young and old to learn and support a future sustainable food system.

Volunteers are our most valuable resource, and we could not accomplish all this without you. Without the willing help of hundreds of seed growers, event organizers, promotion volunteers, youth mentors, translators, writers, and many others, Seeds of Diversity could do only a tiny fraction of its current work.

Thank you!