



SEED CARE / COOL, DRY AND LABELLED

Save for next season.

Seed storage, germination checks and a 36-crop lifespan chart

Seed is alive. Age, heat and moisture affect how well it germinates, and old seed can produce weaker seedlings. Good storage slows decline; it cannot restore damaged seed.

A simple storage routine

STEP	WHAT TO DO
01 / Dry	For home-saved seed, remove pulp and debris and dry thoroughly before sealing. Damp UK autumn air can make drying slow. Use gentle airflow indoors; avoid ovens, radiators and hot greenhouses.
02 / Label	Keep the original packet. For saved seed, record crop, variety, harvest year and collection notes. For bought seed, record purchase year and sow-by date; the seed may already be a year old.
03 / Seal	Put dry seed in labelled paper envelopes inside an airtight jar or box. Add a sealed silica-gel sachet, kept separate from seed. Paper envelopes alone do not exclude moisture.
04 / Keep cool	Use a reliably cool, dry cupboard, or an airtight container in the fridge at about 4–5°C. A damp shed or greenhouse is a poor choice for long-term storage.
05 / Warm, then open	After refrigeration, let the sealed container reach room temperature before opening, so moisture does not condense on the cold seed. Return only dry packets to storage.

Test a packet before you rely on it

About a month before sowing, take **20 seeds at random** (or 10 if supplies are limited). Put them on damp kitchen paper in a covered container. Label the sample; use the crop's recommended germination temperature and light conditions. Keep damp, not waterlogged.

Check daily and allow the full expected germination time; parsley and parsnip can be slow. Count normal seedlings, not just split seed coats. **16 seedlings from 20 seeds = 80% germination.** A small test is an estimate; garden emergence can be lower.

Use the result to plan

If the result is poor or seedlings weak, fresh seed is usually the better use of limited space. If you keep the batch, sow extra and thin to the correct spacing. Never eat seeds sold for sowing; they may be treated.



SEED CARE / KEEP, TEST OR REPLACE

How long do seeds last?

Approximate useful storage life for common vegetables and herbs

Years below are **rough planning ranges from harvest** for dry, mature, untreated seed kept consistently cool and dry. Bought seed is not necessarily new: do not add these years to a packet's sow-by date. Germination testing is more useful than age alone.

CROP	YEARS	CROP	YEARS
Aubergine	2-4	Cucumber	3-6
Basil	3-5	Dill	1-4
Beans, broad	3-4	Kale	3-5
Beans, French	3-4	Leek	1-2
Beans, runner	3-4	Lettuce	1-5
Beetroot	2-4	Onion	1-2
Broccoli	3-5	Parsley	1-3
Brussels sprouts	3-5	Parsnip	1*
Butternut squash	2-4	Pea	3-4
Cabbage	3-5	Pepper / chilli	2-3
Carrot	2-3	Pumpkin	2-4
Cauliflower	4-5	Radish	4-5
Celeriac	3-5	Spinach, true	1-3
Celery	3-5	Spring onion	1-2
Chard	2-4	Swede	3-5
Chives	1-3	Sweetcorn	1-2
Coriander	1-4	Tomato	3-5
Courgette	2-4	Turnip	4-5

***Parsnip:** buy or save fresh seed each season for reliability. Some older seed can germinate, but test before committing a row. Prioritise fresh onion, spring onion and leek seed too.

These are not expiry dates. Sources report different lifespans; the chart uses practical, generally cautious ranges. Some batches fail sooner and some last much longer. Heat or damp can shorten any range.

Exceptions: pelleted or primed seed may store for less time; follow the supplier's advice. Potato tubers, garlic cloves and onion sets are planting material, not dry seeds, and are outside this chart.