

ISABEL MOTYKA SANDERS  
NURSERY SCHOLAR 2024-2025  
OCTOBER 2024 REPORT

October was a pretty major month for seeds! I got to witness and participate in the whole spectrum of seed-related propagation from collection, cleaning and storing to sowing and pricking out, all in the same month!

I have been a compulsive seed collector for years, creating little caches everywhere I go. Sometimes I am organised about the matter; use old envelopes, paper sandwich bags or hand folded origami packets; a name, provenance and date of collection written out clearly (though it has been known for a packet to read: golden arching grass and *Knautia*-type-thing, Geraneia pine woods, 2019). Other times seeds and fruits are wadded up into tissues or stuffed loose into backpacks and coat pockets; lain artfully across dashboards to then blow out of the window, any memory of the plant they came from long forgotten. Part scientist, part animal.

When I came to Great Dixter in September I brought many of my seeds with me and have gone about sowing them. They have been very good at humouring my dubious collection records and we are genuinely excited about some of the plants coming up! But when it comes to dealing with seeds in a professional setting like the nursery it is key to do things properly! Below is an outline of the seed process here from point of collection to sowing and storing.

Continually **collecting** seeds from the garden

- Paper bags and envelopes of different sizes
- Plastic bags for whole fruits
- Labels (if using plastic bags)
- Pencils
- Snips

**Cleaning** seeds

- Keep heads and pods in paper bags to dry out and release seeds
- Manually extract seeds
- Thresh or scrunch
- Can use sieves of various sizes to separate seed from chaff
- Blowing or winnowing

**Storing**

- Once thoroughly dried and ideally thoroughly cleaned
- In paper bags or envelopes that are clearly labelled
  - Name of plant
  - Origin of material
  - Date collected
  - Relevant info eg erratic germinator or special treatment
  - If sown – when and how much

**Sowing**

Choose size and depth of pot according to volume of seed to be sown, size of seed, germination behaviour and root type (taproot? Dislikes disturbance? Strong vigorous roots? Slow or shallow rooting?). This is so root development to empty soggy cold soil is at an optimum ratio.

Usually use a basic #2 soil mix but sometimes may need a more specialised one (eg more grit to help Fabaceae seed casings to slough off)

Overfill pot, tap down once, strike off with a straightedge, tamp evenly with a square or round tamper

Experiment with sowing techniques to find which works for you.. tapping or shaking out of seed packet? Off of folded paper? Out of hand? Pinch and roll of thumb and forefinger? Large seeds can be placed, very fine seed can be mixed with sand to make even sowing easier.

Large seeds can be pressed into surface of soil

Some seeds sown directly into module tray!

Larger seeds receive a sieving of soil

GD Nursery tops pots with grit, finer grit for fine seed

Label

Name of plant

Origin of seed

Quantity of pots if more than one (1/2. 1/3 etc)

Date of sowing

### Oddities

Some seeds can be collected unripe eg *Euphorbia*, *Apiaceae*

Some seeds must be sown fresh so should not be stored eg *Apiaceae*

Some seeds can be soaked eg *Fabaceae*

Some seeds benefit from processing to encourage them to break their dormancy eg heat or smoke, fermentation, soaking, scarifying, stratifying

Needless to say, as with everything that the nursery here does, they are constantly experimenting, researching and pushing the rules. Eg using #2 for seed sowing.

Some other things of note

Scholars Intro to Garden with Fergus (1<sup>st</sup> Oct)

Watching Fergus do a mind-map for the year was thoroughly fascinating. While most of the details and specifics are not entirely relevant to my life back home in Greece, the “Dixter Way” can be adapted to suit any climate or situation. It is about thinking more connectedly, getting to the root of WHY things are done; can they be done differently; can more care be worked into it (eg hedge clipping and tree pruning vs nesting animals and insects), can this care be worked into the schedule. **Efficiency being a complex web that considers all levels of life as opposed to a streamlined linear binary.**

I was also introduced to the fun of chip rolls for lunch from the Northiam Fish Bar. And Michael got a bunch of colourful clipboards which looked wonderful as a stained glass window effect in the nursery office!



Also started fermenting some more *Rosaceae* fruit such as *Crataegus pentagyna*, *Sorbus hupehensis* and



*Karpathosorbus bristolensis*.

AUTUMN PLANT FAIR WEEKEND!!! 5-6 October

Bought plants for the sand bed!!! Listened to some very interesting talks from the growers! Was very keen on No Name Nursery and of course Zophian!

Some grasses I learned about:

*Stipa pseudoichu* – Tall, coastal dry

*Anemanthele lessoniana* – for all situations, lovely colouration

*Panicum virgatum* – Great colour, deep roots so good for stabilisation and drought tolerance

Have started sowing some of my Greek seeds <3 such as *Stachelinia petiolata* and *Securigera globosa*, both from Therisso Gorge Crete, from when I visited Jennie Moody to look for Oliver Rackham's phlomis in the White Mountains.



This photograph demonstrates why it is best to take cuttings