

The Alternative Kitchen Garden

Episode 50 transcript



“Hello and welcome to episode 50 of the Alternative Kitchen Garden. I’m Emma and today I’m going to be talking about seed swaps. There’s not a lot going on in the garden in January, and the weather here is frightful, with terrible rain all the time – it’s really grotty. But we’re coming up on February now, and February seems to be **the** month for swapping seeds. Getting everything you want together before the start of the new sowing season, and passing on your spares.

Now, if you remember, [episode 28](#) was on seed saving from your garden, so if you’ve been saving your seeds over the winter you may well have some excess home-saved seeds that you’d like to swap for something else.

Seed swaps are great, because you can get new seeds more cheaply than you would be able to buy them, you can find some rare and hard-to-find stuff, some interesting stuff, and you can help to conserve heirloom or heritage seeds. And if you want to know more about heritage seeds you can go back and listen to the episodes which have [Patrick](#) talking about heirloom seeds and their history – and those were episodes [22](#), [23](#) and [24](#).

If you go to an actual, physical seed swap, of course you might find some like-minded people in your community and have a great day out for not much money at all. I’ll give you a link in the show notes to an episode of the [Food Programme](#), because they went to Brighton’s famous [Seedy Sunday](#) (which is a big seed swap here in the UK, one of the first and most publicized) and they went in 2006 and not only did they find some heirloom varieties that they were looking for, they met up with Ben from the [Real Seed](#) company, because if you go to a big event like this sometimes there are stalls from seed companies and Real Seeds are one of the people who go to these events and [Thomas ETTY](#) go as well. And sometimes, depending on where you go, you might find the [Heritage Seed Library](#) as well.

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On the Food Programme, they also speak to [Association Kokopelli](#), which is a French heritage seed organization, and you can buy their seeds online. Brighton's Seedy Sunday is set for the 3rd February this year, it looks like at the moment, and I'll give you a link in the show notes to the website for that so you can find out exactly where to go and what time.

Last year, [Garden Organic](#) incorporated a seed swap in their [Potato Days](#) at Ryton Organic Gardens, which is in Coventry. Now the idea of the Potato Day is that you rock up and you can buy as few or as many potatoes (in various varieties) as you want. And it's a great way to buy your seed potatoes, especially if you want some unusual varieties. And with the Potato Day, it's usually best to get there early because they sell out of some of the most popular varieties fairly quickly.

And Potato Day at Ryton is 2nd February if you're a member of Garden Organic and 3rd February if you're a member of the public. The seed swap is a little bit different, because people bring seeds to swap. So if you get your potatoes, you want to do that early on in the day, but if you go round the seed swap early on in the day you'll be missing out on some of the good things that people bring in later. So it's a good idea to make a day out of it and go round the seed swap at least a couple of times and see whether there's anything good has turned up since you were last there.

So those are just a couple of large seed swaps that are publicized nationally, but of course there may well be a local one near you if you keep an eye out for local events. Or you can even hold your own. If you know that there are lots of keen gardeners in your community, then you may well be able to set up a seed swap of your own. All you really need is a couple of tables somewhere nice and dry and some people to come along and swap their seeds. You could even have one at work.

Just a few hints and tips if you're going to a seed swap. As I said, go round more than once, because somebody may have brought in something very interesting just after you passed by. Check the rules before you go – some seed swaps you have to bring seeds to be allowed in, others you have to pay an entrance fee. Some are more strict about the sorts of seeds that you can bring than others; some only accept heirloom or heritage varieties, some only accept organic seeds, some will accept anything. Take a pen and a notebook with you, to jot down what you've picked up and any growing instructions that are hanging around, in case they're not printed on the envelope. If you've got seeds to give away then pack them up before you go. Make sure you've got a reasonable amount of seeds in each envelope and it's marked at least with the name of the variety, and any growing hints and tips if you can fit them on.

And, as I said, check the dates and times, because sometimes they do alter, so make sure (especially if you're travelling any distance), that the event is still on when you think it's on before you set off.

Now if you can't make it to a public event like that, then there are some alternatives. If you join the Heritage Seed Library (that's from Garden Organic) then, as well as getting 6 packets of heritage seeds for your money, you can also join in the seed

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swapping section that takes place in the catalogue. People list what they have and what they want and you can get in touch with them directly to organize a swap.

There's lots of [internet forums](#) on gardening, and many of those have a seed swap event, especially at this time of year. They range from people listing what they've got and what they want, and arranging one-on-one swaps between themselves, to the sort of round-robin events where one person starts it, packs up all their seeds and sends it to the next person on the list, they take out what they want, put in what they've got and send it off again. The postage can be a little bit expensive on that one, and I have to say – from my experience – at some point during the chain it gets lost in the post. If you're a way down on the list, it never gets to you and that can be very disappointing.

If you are getting involved in internet swapping, and especially if it's a forum that you haven't been a member of for very long, then do remember to be very careful who you send your real life address too, even your email contact details, be very careful who you give those too.

And also you have to be aware that there are some people who will try and rip you off, so you might send out some seeds and not get back anything in return or you may have someone who trolls along your forum, asks for lots of seeds from everyone and then just disappears. Comes out with a sob story, usually, about how they've just started their new garden, or they want to start a garden for their child and they've got no money to do it – can you send them some seeds? Everyone is very generous, sends them a whole load of seeds, and you never hear from them again.

However, I have to say that the majority of people you meet in these internet seed swaps are genuine, and generous, and you'll have no problems with them. And you get some lovely new seeds to try for free and so do they, and everybody's happy.

And of course if you end up with a surplus of seeds you can consider giving them away to, maybe, a local school with a garden project, or to the gardening charity [Thrive](#). And Thrive build and maintain gardens for disadvantaged people and people with disabilities, special gardens that they can have some horticultural therapy in, and Thrive are always grateful for some seeds that they can use in their gardens. So I'll put a link in the show notes to their webpage and you can have a look for yourself and find their contact address.

Now if you're involved in a seed swap, whether it's real life or on an internet forum, and you'd like to publicize it (wherever you are in the world) then send me an events listing and I'll read them out on the show as and when they arrive. Just send an email to akgpodcast@gmail.com, leave me a comment on the show home page – which is <http://coopette.com/akg>, or start a discussion in the [Facebook group](#), and I'll put a link to that in the show notes. So if you've got an event that you'd like to share with everybody else then do let me know.

That's it for this week. I'm hoping for some better weather, I hope it's good where you are and that you're enjoying your garden. Take care.”

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