

Pole Lima Bean Seeds: Drying and Storing for Next Season

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Pole lima beans are a popular crop grown in the Mid-Atlantic region. However, getting pole lima bean seeds can be difficult and expensive to purchase. You may also wonder if the seeds are from plants that have ideal characteristics. If you already grow pole lima beans, you may consider saving seeds instead of buying them for the following season.



Advantages of saving seeds

- Saves money
- Seeds are adapted to your growing environment
- You become self sufficient
- Ability to select plants with highly desirable characteristics



Selecting the best plants

When saving seeds, select them from the best and healthiest plants. The plants should be robust, have nice green leaves, be free of any disease, have large bean pods, and produce high yields. For the large heirloom varieties, select those plants that have great characteristics such as bean size, pod size and number of beans per pod. Remember, the desired characteristics of pole lima beans vary according to the variety, so choose plants that represent those features for your operation.



Harvesting seeds

Harvest your pole lima beans when the pod has matured in the plant. You should be able to feel a lump in the pod, which will be your seed. After harvesting the pods, sort them and make sure that the pods do not have any damage or insect bites on them. Place them on a flat surface or screen surface in a single layer (not overlapping since they would not dry appropriately and rot) that receives good air circulation and let them dry for a week. After a week, check the pods and make sure they are completely dried.



What to save?

When the bean pods are completely dried, start shelling the beans. Be selective about the seeds you save. Pods should have distinct features of the variety, containing three or more seeds. Remove any seed that has an insect bite, unusual shape, size or color.

Storage

After drying and selecting seeds, you can proceed to picking your storage container; glass and plastic jars or manila envelopes work well. The containers should be clean and dried, and preferably have a screw top or a good seal that creates an airtight effect. After placing the seeds in the container, it is very important to label the seeds and year to avoid any confusion. When you are finished, place the containers or envelopes in a cool dry place such as a refrigerator, or in a dark, cool and dry cabinet at or below 50 °F. Recall that for every 10 degrees colder, seed life doubles. A general rule of thumb is that legumes can last up to three years in freezing temperatures. Do not place seeds in temperatures higher than 65 °F in a place that receives light, as this can increase relative humidity and seed development.



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