The Radicle

Salt Spring Seed Sanctuary Newsletter

Summer 2022

Happy Anniversary!

Macro image of a Red Zinnia flower

November 2022 marks the 20th anniversary of Salt Spring's Seed Sanctuary. All the way along, our mandate has been to preserve, promote and enhance our heritage of open-pollinated, non-hybrid, non-GMO, simple saveable seeds.

In the beginning years, our Seed Sanctuary was similar to the US Seed Savers Association and Seeds of Diversity, Canada. There was an important difference between Salt Spring's seed bank and the other two national organizations. Like the other two non-profits, membership enabled growers to access seeds and possibly relist them in the annual seed directories. An additional requirement for our members was to provide feedback on the performance of any seed cultivar that was chosen to grow out.

A lifetime membership back then cost $20 and a grower could choose as many as 5 varieties to grow out each year. We still have the same arrangement.

Learning how varieties did across the country enabled us to build up a large collection of widely tested and adapted varieties. Many of these were enhanced by choosing seeds from the healthiest and earliest plants in the grow outs.

In our first decade, we came to have over six hundred members across Canada. We maintained extensive databases of several hundred seeds. As more people began to see the importance of non-corporate seeds, our work and our seeds helped inspire many other similar, more local initiatives across Canada and the United States. In the past decade, seed banks, sanctuaries and libraries have sprouted up everywhere! We have donated start up seeds to dozens of those seed initiatives.

Many seed libraries are now housed in actual book libraries and members take out seeds as they would books, with a portion of the seeds being returned after the next year's seed harvest. For a few years, our own Salt Spring

Seed Sanctuary operated out of our public library in Ganges. Now our seeds are stored at the new food processing and storage facility called the Root on Beddis Road.

As seed banks have evolved across the continent, our focus has shifted to be a local rather than a national one. The other Gulf Islands now have their own seed banks and most of our members are now Salt Spring Islanders. In 2011, we started this local newsletter called the Radicle and this is the first edition in awhile because of Covid.

The importance of local food and seed resilience has become an important part of our seed mandate. Our mantra is that good food comes from good seed. The need for local self-reliance has become extremely clear now that we can no longer count on consistent weather, ferries to be running, gasoline to be available or the post office or banks to be open.

The most important seeds to preserve are the ones that can best nourish and sustain us. They are the beans, grains and seeds used as food, such as dried beans and peas, favas, lentils, chickpeas, wheat, barley, oats, rye, soybeans, quinoa, flax and amaranth. These are actually the easiest seeds to save because the seeds are the food and no elaborate seed saving techniques are required. We have many varieties of all of them at our storage place at the Root.

We also have been growing them out for the past 3 years at our plot at Ruckle Park, under the auspices of managers there, Mike and Marjorie Lane.

The facilities at the Root will now enable us to store crops that usually need to be overwintered before they go to seed, such as beets and carrots. We might also be able to store and preserve crops there that are not normally propagated by seed, such as potatoes and garlic. This past spring we were happy to successfully host Salt Spring's annual Seedy Saturday at the Root.

"The importance of local food and seed resilience has become an important part of our seed mandate. Our mantra is that good food comes from good seed".

The Board of our Sanctuary Society is keen and excited about what we can do as we enter our third decade. One possible new direction we have discussed is to have a network of local seed stewards that would commit to maintaining one or more varieties; this would help solidify the continuity of our Seed Sanctuary for years to come. We encourage you to hop on board our seedy Society and help co-create a viable future for us all. To this end, we will be sharing an online survey inviting our members to offer their visions and wishes for the future of the Seed Sanctuary – stay tuned!

The Seed Sanctuary in numbers

20 Years saving seeds
577 Members
115 Varieties in our database
Innumerable seed donations!

"The Root" of It: Updates from The Farmland Trust

The Farmland Trust was in full swing at this year's Salt Spring Fall Fair; host of the "Pay by Donation" field parking lot, and an exciting collaborative booth with our partnership initiative Grow Local and the food purchasing app "localsalt".

Grow Local is a pilot project that will kick-start operations at The Root. Six Island farms and several family gardeners planted 3,000 feet of root vegetables this season – beets, carrots, potatoes, onions, rutabagas, turnips, and radishes – which are now available to purchase. Profits from the sales will be donated to The Farmland Trust to fund food system programming and community workshops at The Root in 2023. Get your fall and winter root cellars full of these locally-grown veggie staples for a good cause through the local food purchasing app – localsalt.

This Spring the SSI Farmland Trust was awarded funds from The Victoria Foundation to finish the commercial-grade kitchen at The Root with the aim to have it ready for tenant arrangements by the new year. This will be the only publicly accessible commercial kitchen and food processing centre on Salt Spring, ideal for chefs, meal production, farms, and value-added food producers. The space is also envisioned as a new business incubator for food entrepreneurs and for training and demonstrations. Bulk water is approved for current needs and a community water hook-up will be part of our fundraising focus in the coming months.

As part of Transition Salt Spring's month-long Arts Festival "On the Rise" featuring a series of events navigating climate grief and action, Farmland Trust is building a Living Mandala at The Root on September 25th from 10:30am to 5pm. The invitation is open to all to bring plants and soil amendments – choosing materials that focus on building soil health. Those who attend will have the opportunity to collectively design and "plant" the mandala. Written letters of grief and love to the land are welcomed and will be used as the final layer of mulch and meaning. This is a great opportunity to connect with community members, the land, and your hopes for healthy food systems on our island.

The Root continues its role with storing community seeds at the Seed Bank, seed-saving knowledge exchange and mentorship and, once again, hosting the Seed Cleaning Trailer and Seedy Saturdays – as it has done the past two years. Read on for more information on the Seed Cleaning Trailer.

The Root on Beddis Road

The Farmland Trust's vision is to support and inspire a vibrant, thriving, and prosperous agricultural community on Salt Spring and within the Southern Gulf Islands, increasing the percentage of local food that is grown, purchased, and consumed for a more sustainable, food-secure future. Consider being part of the efforts by donating or volunteering on one of our active committees. More information about The Farmland Trust and The Root can be found on The Farmland Trust's recently launched new website! www.ssifarmlandtrust.org

To Clean your Seeds or To Not Clean your Seeds…

Seed savers frequently consider the pros and cons of cleaning their seeds.

There are times when "food grade" becomes important when we do not know what the chaff in our beans or amaranth is – for example. But for seeds like lettuce or kale, how much of an issue is all that chaff?

Experts in the field – who may sell seeds find that chaff is not a great thing; their cleaning choice has been simplified and honed down to a good set of screens and a small air compressor or fans.

For those who save seeds for home use or smaller trading scale this remains a conundrum, with often the choice being based on what equipment, time and space is available for the seed cleaning and storage process.

In recent years, FarmFolk CityFolk (FFCF) developed a mobile Seed Cleaning Trailer, full of tested and well-designed equipment that can assist with any scale of seed cleaning needs. During this time, they have cleaned over 100,000 pounds of over 50 seed varieties as part of their mission to support BC farmers and increase the availability of provincially grown organic seed.

Often a lack or complete absence of equipment, such as the equipment in the trailer, stops growers from pursuing certain opportunities. Seed cleaning can be tedious but the trailer increases the efficiency of this process while reducing labour costs, and improves the quality of the finished product. For example, the mobile trailer helps farmers increase the germination rate of their seed lots as compared to sorting by hand. In addition to cleaning lots of seeds, the trailer helps farmers scale-up and incorporate seed production and cleaning as an economically viable part of their business which leads to great food system resilience for all.

"BC's food system resiliency relies on the availability of locally bred seeds, able to withstand the province's varied growing conditions. Through this program, we support both farmers and home gardeners to build a resilient seed supply" – FFCF

The Mobile Seed Cleaning Trailer has been on tour across southern portions of the province, responding to demand for on-farm seed cleaning capabilities. This year, the trailer is coming to Salt Spring again in October - this time for a full week! This will offer island growers a chance to determine and experience first-hand the value and steps in their seed saving and stewardship.

The trailer is booked in several communities throughout the Gulf Islands, Vancouver Island and the Lower Mainland – and beyond. Please get in touch with FFCF if you are curious about it coming to your community. For the backstory on FFCF and their Seed Security Program, visit their website:
https://farmfolkcityfolk.ca/bc-seed-security-program/

Removing the chaff from the beans with an air compressor

Chickpeas (Cicer arietinum)

Chickpeas are rarely found in seed catalogues or seed banks although they are a very important food. Try to find a vegetarian who doesn't know about chickpea hummus!

Hundreds of thousands of acres of chickpeas are grown in North America but almost all of them are exported to countries where they are loved and highly valued. Any chickpeas (or "garbanzos") that you might find in supermarkets are usually imported.

Chickpeas have been cultivated as a high protein staple for over 10,000 years. They can easily be organically grown in gardens. They are often planted a week or two later than peas and they take a few weeks longer to mature seeds. They can tolerate summer heat much better than peas. In many countries chickpeas are enjoyed like shelling peas and they are even tastier.

Garbanzo plants are tough and vigorous but they are also delicate and graceful. They branch near the ground, are usually about 2 feet high and their lacey foliage spreads about a foot in all directions. They should be thinned to a foot apart. Plants don't need staking and there are no vining varieties.

One or two seeds are borne in each of the numerous round swollen pods about 4 months from the time of sowing. Yields are about 300 seeds per plant. Dried chickpeas are harder to shell than other legumes: shucking by hand doesn't work as well as foot stomping.

The Salt Spring Seed Sanctuary is maintaining 4 cultivars of chickpeas. Winnifred's is a brown variety that came from a woman who grew it for over 50 years near Boston Bar, BC. Desi Chickpea is also a brown chickpea that was gifted to Sanctuary Board member, Rupert Adams, by Vandana Shiva's Navdanya Foundation in India. Our black chickpea originates from Kabul in Afghanistan and our cream-coloured chickpea called Spello comes from a famous chickpea growing area in Italy. We should have lots of all 4 of these for members to grow and enjoy in 2023.

Salt Spring Sanctuary Society

Box 465, Ganges P.O., Salt Spring Island, BC V8K 2W1, Canada
www.seedsanctuary.com
info@seedsanctuary.com