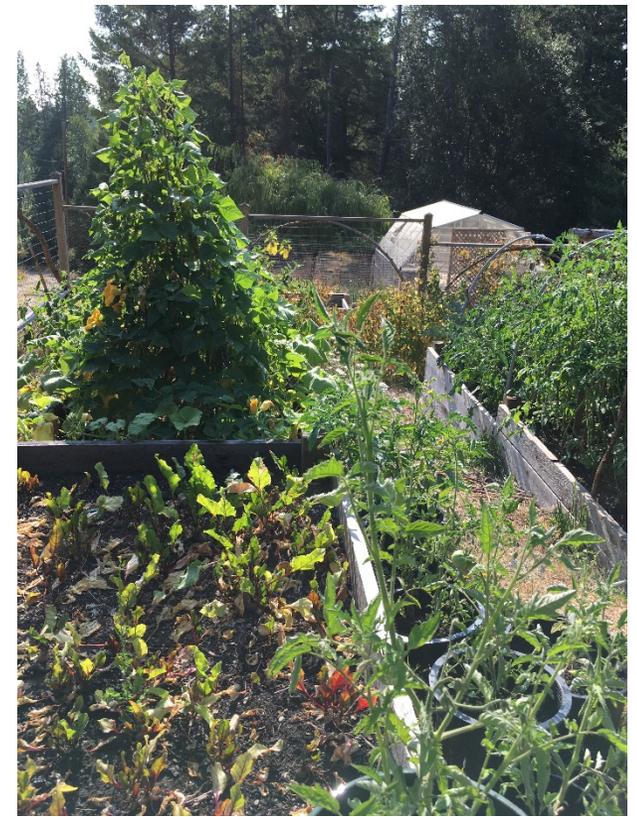


Seed Libraries for Small Islands

Colleen Doty

A short story about our Galiano seed library: how it began, where we are now, and what we hope for



Acknowledgements



As we think about our relationships to the soil, we thank those who have come before.

- The W̱SÁNEĆ and other Straits Salish First Nations
- Selena Flood and the team of people who have worked hard to put on today's event.
- Dan Jason for providing seeds to get our Galiano seed library going.

And to all our community members for their careful attention and passion for growing and contributing seeds to our library.

Why do we need Seed Libraries?

1. Put seed in the hands of the people! Due to corporate consolidation, 3 companies now control 53% of the global commercial seed market. The top 10 seed companies account for 75%.
2. Biodiversity is the key to adapting to change in the 21st century. Globally, we have lost 75% of agricultural diversity in the last 100 years. Seed companies only represent about 10% of the remaining seed varieties.
3. Seed libraries are opportunities for everyday people to be their own plant breeder, selecting for varieties that can withstand weather extremes and associated problems. Seeds become locally adapted to micro-climates.

Data from Seeds of Diversity, 2020





2015 - How Galiano's Seed Library got started

- ▶ Many people in the community were thinking about seed security and the importance of having a seed bank.
- ▶ The Galiano Community Food Program was hosting a seed-saving workshop by Dan Jason of Salt Spring Seeds.
- ▶ At the end of the workshop, Dan presented the group of attendees with a box containing approximately 50 different seed varieties. A gift, for us to start our own seed library. But also, an enormous, sobering responsibility.
- ▶ There were 30 of us in the room and we all looked at each other, unsure of who would take the leadership role. A long silence followed.
- ▶ Would an organization such as the Food Program or the Galiano Conservancy Association take this on? Or, would a seed library be run by an ad hoc committee?
- ▶ In the end, it was decided that the Food Program had capacity to coordinate a seed library. I was the lucky coordinator who took on this role.
- ▶ There was consensus that a seed library would eventually become its own free-standing entity.

Mission Statement

After several months of consideration, our mission statement came together:

- ▶ “To preserve and loan organically grown, non-GMO, open-pollinated, locally successful and genetically diverse seed varieties to the Galiano community;
- ▶ To provide educational opportunities and information to the Galiano community on growing and saving seed.”

The Seed Library of Galiano became a registered society in 2017.



Snapshot of Galiano's Seed Library Today

- Six member board.
- 103 household memberships
- 12% increase in memberships over last year
- 9.9% of the Galiano population are members of the Seed Library (based on the 2016 Census)
- 101 different varieties of seeds on our catalogue, with a focus on edibles or medicinals
- 22% of our membership checked out seed in 2019
- 17% seed-return rate in 2019
- Members pay \$10 for a lifetime membership



Organization of the Collection

Our seed inventory is divided into three categories of seeds:

1. General Collection (40% seeds)

- available for all members to borrow and *hopefully* return

2. Designated Grower (40% seeds)

- growers who have been approached/volunteered to grow specific varieties, as a way of maintaining seed integrity

3. Reserve Collection (20%) - Seed Bank concept, preservation



How we operate

- ▶ All our seeds are stored in large storage tubs at the Community Library in a storage closet.
- ▶ When we have Seed Lending Days, we pull everything out and provide a drop-in time in the Library Meeting Room.
- ▶ Every seed packet has a unique identifier code so we can track the seed packet through its life cycle.
- ▶ Seed Lending Days happen in the spring; Seed Check-in Days are scheduled in the Autumn
- ▶ Our Seed Lending and Seed Intake Days are run by Seed Library Society volunteers, not the Community Library volunteers.



Native Seeds



We have a small collection of native seeds, supplied by the Galiano Conservancy Association.



Seed Crop Record

SEED LIBRARY of GALIANO CROP RECORD, 2017

Common Name: (e.g. Bean, Pea)	Grower Name:	Code
Botanical Name:		
Variety: (e.g. Black Turtle, Bush)		
Year Seed Grown and Collected for you the borrower (not by you):		

SEED SOURCE

Where did the seed last come from? Who held the seed before you planted it?
(eg: seed company, SLOG, family heirloom, friend, your own saved seed)

If From Seed Library Stock - Year Borrowed from Library:
How long have you been growing this seed at the current location? Other locations?

GROWING INFORMATION

Date first planted:
Approx # of Seeds Planted:
Approx. Germination Rate (%):
Did you try growing the seeds multiple times? If so, how many times?

If you transplanted your seedlings, what date (s) did you transplant?

Number of Plants Grown:
Productivity - Low Moderate Vigorous
(Circle):

Location on Property (Circle all that apply): Outdoors Greenhouse Cloche

Number of Days Seed to Food:
Number of Days Seed to Seed: Date Ready to Eat (Even Small):

Date Seed Harvested:
At time of harvest, where the plants grown in pots or in the ground?

RESILIENCE: Did your plants encounter any problems? Please circle all that apply.

Blight	Mildew	Heat Stress	Scorching	Over-watering	Root Rot	Neglect
Drought	Lack of Water	Failure to Thrive for Unknown Reason				Other
Pests: rodents, birds, wood-bugs/pill bugs/ caterpillars, wire worms, cabbage moths, beetles					Other	

Would you grow this again?
Other relevant information (flavour, ease of threshing, etc):

- ▶ Cindy Conner’s book, “Seed Libraries and Other Means of Keeping Seeds in the Hands of the People” has been an invaluable resource.
- ▶ Every seed packet lent out is accompanied by a Seed Crop Record.
- ▶ Seed Crop records contribute to our goal of trying to maintain seed integrity.



Importance of Seed Libraries for Small Communities



3. Climate change adaptation for micro-climates

- When one saves seed, one becomes a plant-breeder. (Carol Deppe “Breed your own Vegetable Varieties”)
- Select seed from plants that are drought-tolerant.

1. Enhancing Food Security

Small communities, especially islands, are more vulnerable to being cut off when supply chains fail or when weather or natural disasters occur.

- Our food usually costs more because of transportation costs.
- Food that is transported long distances is nutritionally deprived

2. Seed-saving builds community in a profound way.

- When one saves and donates seed to a library, one selects the food quality for someone else’s plate.
- Seed libraries are most successful when relationships are solid.
- We need strong communities for tougher times ahead.

Seed Libraries are a perfect fit for small communities

- ▶ There is usually a strong volunteer culture in small communities. The general expectation is that good systems require volunteers. All of our local organizations, such as the community library, recycling centre, and health care centre, rely heavily upon volunteers.
- ▶ The benefits of Seed libraries are usually accepted, for there is a heightened consciousness of the need for greater food security. People are more aware of their vulnerabilities.
- ▶ One knows who the growers are and can forge relationships and with them.
- ▶ Organizations can partner with seed libraries and share knowledge and resources.
- ▶ One encounters the same people frequently, so there tends to be more investment in relationships. After all, we will eventually run into Jane Doe at recycling and ask her about those beefsteak tomato seeds!



Challenges

- ▶ Volunteer burn-out
- ▶ Competing events on a small island: “There’s always lots to do.”
- ▶ The skill set required for seed management: detail-oriented growers. Not easy to find.
- ▶ SLOG has a paper-intensive system that is partially duplicated by a spreadsheet that requires manual input. We can’t eliminate the paper because it is more practical in the field. Meanwhile, excel is a powerful tool for analysis.
- ▶ Lack of a more robust database linked to an electronic scanner;



Our hopes for the future

Continued engagement;

More volunteerism

People continuing to experiment, take risks, and save seed

Passing on to the next generation the thrill of being one's own plant breeder

