

*Di*anna Henry has started a revolution. It is a small revolution. Only 40 or so people have joined in so far. But it may someday save our community, insure our food supply, and perhaps keep us all from going hungry.

A lifetime member of Seed Savers, Henry has been saving seed and promoting biological diversity through conventional plant breeding for more than 30 years. She has also been involved in the Midwest Seed Exchange, which includes farmers and gardeners from several Midwestern States.

But last year Henry had a worrying insight: Lawrence has a successful farmer's market, but most of the farmers were not saving their own seed. Most local farmers order their seed each season from sources outside the state.



The World is Going to Seed: The Kaw Valley Seed Project hopes so!

Harriet Dillon

Why? If you take the trouble to grow organically, and have a plant that is successful in a particular location, why wouldn't you want to propagate it for additional growing seasons in the same climate? Plants that are grown in a particular environment acclimate more and more each year they are grown. Resilience and adaptation are created with each re-seeding, allowing the plant to be even more successful the following years. Plus, the costs of store-bought seed are reduced or avoided altogether by seed saving, so why would any grower choose to buy seed, rather than save their own?

One answer might be because they have chosen to grow hybrids, and seeds saved from hybrids - if they propagate at all - usually revert to one or the other of the original varieties from which the hybrid was created.

But much of the produce at the farmer's market is grown from heritage seed, selected by conscientious farmers because it is non-hybrid. So why aren't many people seed saving?

"Time," is what Dianna Henry thinks is getting in the way of seed saving. "Growing is such an intensive occupation, and just when the season ends is when seed saving begins. Plus, crops can't be stacked in rotation if you need to let the plant sit and 'go to seed'. Still, farmers are always looking for ways to cut costs, and of course lower costs to the grower at this scale usually means lower costs to the customer at the market."

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Dianna Henry.

So, relying on her years of expertise as a seed saver, Henry and a few other like-minded gardeners established the Kaw Valley Seeds Project as a non-profit organization in 2009.

“The goal of the Kaw Valley Seeds Project is to protect and keep vital seeds that we know work in our area, so that we can safeguard our local seed supply, and therefore insure our local food sources.” Says Henry.

The way the Kaw Valley Seed Project plans to do this is to harvest, collect, keep, and share seeds with its membership. Local seed saving will maintain genetic diversity, while propagating seeds that will acclimate and thrive in our local climate. This will hopefully create seeds that can better accommodate the unpredictable changes in the environment which global warming will create.

Since Henry suspects that the reason for the lack of seed saving currently is two-fold: lack of time and a lack of knowledge about how to save seed effectively, she plans to address both needs. First, the Kaw Valley Seeds Project hopes to recruit members who will commit to growing a particular plant, and who will then share their seeds with the community. In this way not every grower has to save seed from every kind of plant they grow. They can simply take on saving a single plant, such as pepper seeds, and then swap them once a year at an annual seed saver exchange for the other seed varieties they need. Henry also plans to host seed saving workshops so that seed saving becomes more widespread and sustainable because the community can rest assured that many of its members are propagating plants that will be useful and plentiful.

Another long-term goal is “to make a seed reserve bank, to keep the seeds we know grow here so that we will be better equipped in natural disasters or as climate change happens.”

The Kaw Valley Seeds Project is holding its First Seed Festival on February 27th, at the Douglas County Fair Grounds. It is FREE and they will provide seed saving information, promote local farming and gardening, will have a number of children’s and family activities, and of course, will be spreading the Seed Saving Revolution!



Red and Blue Corn(mix); Flagstaff, AZ
photograph by Brett Ramey eatweeds@gmail.com