

The Joy of Propagating From Seed
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Why do I grow plants from seeds? Why, indeed, when I think of the frustration of no germination or gratifying germination only to see those brave little nubbins mowed down by damp off or greedy little insects.

To me there is an excitement in inspecting newly seeded pots, watching for signs of the emerging cotyledons. Sometimes I'm astounded to see little cacti developing in a matter of days. Sometimes I've given up on a batch of seeds and reseeded in the same pot to be surprised with a double crop, then trying to remember what it is as I have lost the first tag.

I have tried to grow many different kinds of plants from seeds. Many years ago, when we lived in Cincinnati, I grew avocados as many people have done, and a mango from a seed given to Stan by a co-worker. I've planted grapefruit seeds and had windowsill citrus in the Midwest.

When we lived in Schenectady, Stan devised an indoor greenhouse with grow lights, and I started to try cactus seeds. The only place I could find succulents in New York at that time (late 1960's) was at the variety store. Park's seed catalog was the only source I knew of then for cactus seeds.

After our move to Arizona, I gave up for a while growing succulents from seeds since I was able to buy small inexpensive plants at Kmart. Then I started to see plants not available for sale, and I again started to experiment with seed.

Many of my plants produce copious seeds, which germinate around the mother plant (and in neighbor pots). I have found *Parodias* very easy to grow after they have germinated this way. I also have five nickel- and dime-size *Aztekium ritteri* which germinated this way about six year ago. The seeds of *Aztekium* are like a fleck of black paper, so tiny!

Strombocactus disciformis also has very fine seeds, but I found they grow very well in a separate pot. When I found fresh seeds on a plant, I would throw them in with other young *Strombos* so I have a pot of various sizes doing quite well. They get watered regularly all summer like everything else.

Now that I have a large collection, I have found it interesting to pollinate my own plants and have grown some rare plants this way. *Euphorbia symmetrica*, *Sarcocaulon burmanii*, and *Haworthia maughanii* are some examples. The *H. maughanii* are so slow, but after a year, they are showing definite signs of the cylindrical cut off tips they will eventually have. Other *Haworthias* are not so slow. In a little over a year, *H. venosa v. oertendahlii* have made sturdy plants big enough for three-inch pots.

Of course, in a greenhouse one gets a variety of surprises popping up in pots. I've found *Anacampseros*, *Dorstenias*, *Euphorbias*, and even cacti wandering far from their parents.

In our yard, we have many trees I've started from seeds. There are mature blue palo verdes from seeds collected in McDowell Mountain Park, *Acacia farnesiana* from seeds the Hennessey's gave me backing in the 1970's, a Chilean mesquite from seed of a tree from the Rubicek's yard in Tucson collected on a CACSS bus trip, and young *Acadia stenophylla* which Mike Gallagher grew from seed. We have

another *Acacia* (maybe *shafneri*) grown from seed our youngest son found on his way home from school. I also have very small boojum trees from seeds collected a few years ago by our daughter and son-in-law on a Baja trip.

We have *Aloes* and *Nolinas* from seeds sent to the Desert Botanical Garden from Switzerland on an exchange many years ago. Our CACSS had the opportunity to choose some seeds that were being discarded in a house cleaning.

One year a friend and I sent to South Africa to purchase *Lithop* seeds from Desmond Cole. *Lithops* grow very easily from seeds. It's been neat to see these babies grow up and flower.

I have a bunch of *Bursera microphylla* which I have grown from seed, and am attempting to grow very slowly, thus bonsai-ing them. I've been amazed at how tough these little trees are.

As you can see, there is hardly a seed I don't like. Well, maybe the exception would be vegetables. I grew some patio tomatoes in pots last year, but I became so angry at the birds and insects that I found it much more satisfactory to forego the practical food crop.

There has to be time to say I have grown enough, but I just can't resist trying another tree or shrub or cactus or...