



# THE CALYPSO

NEWSLETTER OF THE DOROTHY KING YOUNG CHAPTER  
CALIFORNIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

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## SPECIAL FEATURE ARTICLE

### COLLECTING and USING NATIVE SEEDS IN YOUR GARDEN

By Natasha Lekach



#### Beach primrose

In a few weeks, the beach primrose (*Camissoniopsis cheiranthifolia*) will unveil its final blossoms, and the first seed pods will be dry and begin to burst open.

Native plant gardeners understand that a garden is more than just a visually appealing space; it is habitat for numerous organisms, both above and below the ground. Over the past few months, bees, butterflies, birds, and other pollinators have been fluttering through the blooms of spring and early summer, bringing joy and vitality to our native plant gardens.

While many plants will continue to bloom well into late fall, some have completed their annual cycle. During this time, there is a temptation to tidy up the garden by deadheading, which involves pruning old growth and removing

seed heads from plants. However, seed heads can actually bring added joy to both the garden and the gardener. Seeds serve as a valuable food source for native birds, attracting finches, sparrows, robins, and a variety of other species to a garden teeming with seeds.

Not only do the birds benefit from the seeds in your garden, but you can too. Allowing your plants to go to seed promotes reseeding and provides opportunities for seed collection. If you don't have the time or inclination to collect and grow your own plants from seeds, you can simply let nature take its course. Many native plants will readily reseed in the vicinity of the parent plant. Some excellent examples of biennials and perennials from the Mendocino Coast include Hooker's evening primrose (*Oenothera elata* subsp. *hookeri*), Rock phacelia (*Phacelia californica*), Coast buckwheat (*Eriogonum latifolium*), California poppy (*Eschscholzia californica* subsp. *maritima*), Blue-eyed grass (*Sisyrinchium bellum*), Yellow-eyed grass (*Sisyrinchium californicum*), and more. Once your annual plants have finished blooming and developed mature seeds, allow the birds to enjoy a little feast. Then, gently pull the plants and shake the seeds out across your garden to help disperse them.

While supporting reseeding in your garden is the easier approach, some gardeners prefer a more controlled method: seed collection. Collecting seeds from your garden allows you to propagate your plants at your own pace and intensity. The most crucial aspect of seed collection is observation. As you wander through your garden, take note of which plants are in bloom, which have finished blooming, where the seeds develop on the plant, how the seeds may disperse, and the dryness of the seeds. Some seed collectors opt for a slightly more passive technique by placing mesh bags over developing seeds to ensure capture while protecting them from birds. Others simply hand-collect the seeds when they are ready. It is important to leave the majority of the seeds for the birds and other seed-eating creatures - most plants produce hundreds or thousands of seeds, no need to get greedy! Some resources suggest removing the whole plant (if annual) or deadheading before the seeds fully mature and storing them in a paper bag placed in a cool, dry location. When the seeds are ready, they will naturally fall or burst into the bag. Although this is an efficient method, it is not my preferred approach as it removes the plant or seed pod from the garden, eliminating a valuable food source and hiding place for wildlife. If you do choose this method, limit your selection to only a few plants, not all of them. continued addendum page 2

#### Lupine Seeds

Lupine legume fruits typically take approximately one month to dry out completely. Once they reach maturity, they crack under the sun's rays and burst open, propelling the seeds away from the parent plant. To ensure successful seed collection, a gardener can employ mesh bags, as depicted here, for capturing the dispersed seeds.

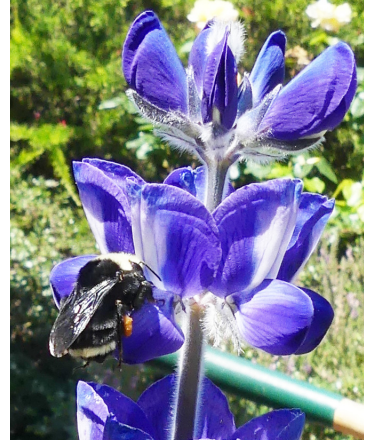


## COLLECTING AND USING NATIVE SEEDS, cont'd

Once you have collected your seeds, some may require cleaning and drying, like separating from the chaff or removing them from fleshy fruits. The [San Diego CNPS Chapter](#) (has a great resource page about cleaning and preparing seeds. After cleaning and possibly drying, storage is the next critical step. For small home gardeners, the easiest approach is to purchase small envelopes. When placing your seeds inside, remember to label them with the species, collection location, date, and original seed source (if known). Store the envelopes in cool, dry, and dark spaces, ensuring they are protected from rodents.

Some species will be ready for planting immediately after collection. For example, most lupine species do not require any special treatment if planted right away. However, if you plan to wait to plant the seeds, they may require scarification to germinate. Other species may have more complex germination processes. The [Native Plant Propagation Network's Protocol Database](#) is an excellent resource for learning about species-specific protocols for seed collection and propagation techniques. You may need to adjust the timing for the Mendocino Coast, but it serves as a wonderful starting point for learning.

Once you've started collecting seeds from your garden, it's also a great time to share. Give some of your seeds to neighbors, friends, and [Library Seed Banks](#). Seed collecting adds to the pleasure of gardening and fosters a sense of community.



Bombus vosnesenskii on lupin  
photo: Katy Pye

***Please note, this article is explicitly to be used as a resource for collecting plants from personal gardens. It is important to be familiar with the [CNPS Policy on Ethics and Best Practices for Collecting Native Plants](#) for other types of collecting.***

### LINKS TO WEB RESOURCES

San Diego CNPS chapter seed collection and storage page: <https://www.cnpsd.org/chapter-blog/2020/6/28/seed-collection-2-proper-cleaning-and-storage>

Native Plant Propagation Network's Protocol Database: <https://npn.rngr.net/propagation>

Mendo seed libraries: <https://www.mendolibrary.org/borrow/seed-libraries>

CNPS Seed Collection Ethics and Best Practices: [https://www.cnps.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/PS-20\\_Professional\\_Collecting\\_Ethics\\_and\\_Best\\_Practices.pdf](https://www.cnps.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/PS-20_Professional_Collecting_Ethics_and_Best_Practices.pdf)



Crossbill - a beak made for seeds  
photo: Katy Pye

### ANNUAL PLANT SALES

#### **NOTE - NEW DATES AND LOCATIONS!**

**CASPAR COMMUNITY CENTER  
OCTOBER 14TH 10AM-3PM**

**SOUTHERN SALE DATE (OCT. 7 OR 21ST);  
LOCATION & DATE - TBD**

When set, a notice will be sent  
to members via e-mail