

Cleaning seeds

Seeds should be cleaned soon after they are collected. The way seeds are cleaned depends on the type of fruit associated with the seeds.

The major fruit types include:

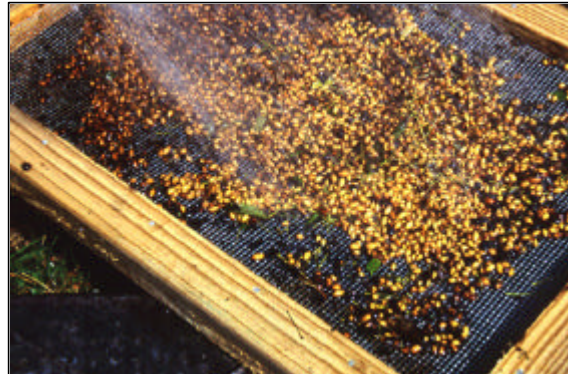
1. Fleshy fruits including pomes, berries, and drupes.
2. Dry fruits including capsules, samaras, and nuts.

Fleshy fruits

Seeds can be separated from fleshy fruits in several ways. If the fleshy fruit is kind of dry (as in pomes and pome-like fruit), they can be simply cut open and the seeds removed. This is the case for hawthorn seeds.

If the fruit is soft and moist, then it can be rubbed off the seeds under running water. This works well for some berries and drupes like dogwood and black cherry. For a large number of seeds, you can use wire mesh screens or a modified blender.

Wire mesh screens can be simply made by attaching hardware cloth to a wooden frame. The size of the screen depends on the seed size. The opening should be smaller than the seed. Rub the fruit off the seeds by moving them back and forth against the screen. You may want to wear rubber gloves to prevent staining your hands. A stream of water from a garden hose will help further separate the fruit and the seeds.



A blender can be used to separate seeds from small fleshy fruits. This requires replacing the metal blade with a small piece of rubber tubing. Once the blender is modified, you can place a small amount of seeds in the blender with just enough water to cover the seeds. Several bursts of the blender will remove much of the fruit from the seeds. Pour off the water and fruit parts leaving the heavier seeds in the bottom of the blender. You may need to repeat several times to adequately clean the seeds.



Dry fruits

In some cases, the dry fruit contains many seeds that are scattered after the fruit opens. Examples include sweetgum, Ohio buckeye, eastern white pine, and eastern hemlock. These fruits should be collected before they open and allowed to dry in a warm location. The fruits will naturally open and shed the seeds.



In other cases, the dried fruit is part of the seed unit. This is the case with most samaras or winged seeds. Examples include maple, ash, and tulip poplar. They can be planted as a single unit or the wing can be broken off before sowing.



Nuts are also considered part of the seed unit. The only true nut found in this group of plants is in oak where it is called an acorn. There is no further cleaning required except to remove the cup at the bottom of the acorn. However, oak seeds do not tolerate drying and do not store very well. Oak seeds should be sown soon after collection and those with dormancy should receive moist, chilling stratification.

There are always a percentage of oak seeds that contain weevils. You can use a float test to separate those seeds with the insect. Seeds that float usually are infested with weevils.

