



STARTING FROM SEED

Nonprofit Seed Savers Exchange is helping to promote food security and genetic preservation

IN 1975, TWO HOMESTEADERS WATCHED AS commercial hybrids replaced many heirloom seeds that gardeners had shared for generations. The pair's collection started with seeds from one co-founder's grandfather, and Seed Savers Exchange grew from there. Four decades later, the nonprofit maintains more than 20,000 varieties on 890 acres near Decorah, Iowa. As it connects 13,000 members who swap seeds, Seed Savers also supports global genetic-preservation efforts.

When gardeners gather for the organization's 35th annual conference, July 17 to 19, they'll learn from headliners like alum and author Deborah Madison. Event seminars add context to current topics in preservation, says Diane Ott Whealy, Seed Savers Exchange co-founder (pictured).



AMERICAN WAY: What can people expect at Seed Savers Exchange?

DIANE OTT WHEALY: When you see peppers and tomatoes of every size, shape and color, you understand diversity and what we're trying to save. We also showcase the importance of preserving our environment.

AW: Explain the link between saving seeds and securing our food supply.

DOW: Seeds produce our food, and we're helping people make that

connection. We've seen an increase in people caring about where their food comes from. Our role is to give them the information to save their own seeds.

AW: Any advice for those new to harvesting and saving seeds?

DOW: You don't need a lot of space or education or technical equipment — our ancestors worked with knowledge from previous generations. We want to make gardening and seed saving a part of people's lives again. —RENEE BRINCKS