

New Seed Library Opens at the Round Valley Public Library

The Willits News

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Special to the Willits News

The first seed library in Mendocino County has just opened at the Round Valley Public Library in Covelo. The Seed Library is one of several seed libraries to open this year in Northern California.

Seed libraries are a fairly new phenomenon. The concept is simple: patrons "check out" seeds, take them home to grow tasty and nutritious food for their families, let a portion of the crop go to seed, save some of that seed for planting next season and return some to the library.

With high food prices gardening has come back into style.

"Growing your own food is like printing your own money," according to food activist Ron Finley.

Combine that with the fact that people from all walks of life are rediscovering that fruits and vegetables grown in their own backyards have a flavor that just isn't found in supermarket produce and you have a new generation of Victory Gardens sprouting up all over the country.

There are benefits to growing and saving seed of heirloom and other open pollinated varieties of food plants besides saving money. One is that after several seasons the plants grown become acclimatized to local conditions. The plants become better suited to the area than the plants grown from seed raised in other parts of the country. By selecting for desirable traits, the gardener can develop strains that mature earlier, or taste sweeter, or tolerate higher temperatures.

People are also attracted to seed saving for philosophical reasons. According to many estimates, we've lost more than 90% of the food plant varieties that existed a century ago. Big agricultural corporations rely on monocultures, and the ensuing loss of genetic diversity reduces food crops' ability to adapt to pests, plant disease, and changes in climate. A large percentage of seed savers are motivated to save seeds in response to corporations who quietly bought up seed companies over the last few decades only to "discontinue" production of old time varieties in favor of hybrid or GMO varieties that need to be purchased from the company every growing season.

"By reclaiming the tradition of seed saving, we are taking seeds out of the hands of big corporations and putting them back into the hands of backyard gardeners," says Pat Sobrero, Seed Librarian at the Seed Library.

People can become members of the Seed Library and withdraw seeds by promising to return some open-pollinated seed at the end of the growing season, either seed they've saved or commercially grown seed, preferably seed grown close to "home."

Anyone is welcome to check out any type of seed they want to plant, although the Seed Library discourages its patrons from returning "advanced difficulty" seed until the gardener has the knowledge, time, and skill to do it correctly. This ensures that the next person to check out seed will grow out what they intend.

The library offers brochures and handouts on basic seed saving, has many books on seed saving available for checkout, and plans to offer classes on gardening and seed saving in the future.

The Seed Library is open during the Round Valley Public Library's regular hours, Tuesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.. You can find out more about the Seed Library by visiting their facebook page: www.facebook.com/TheSeedLibrary.

