

WEST LIFE

# Growth collective

Circle of seed-saving and lending continues at unique Hotchkiss library

**HOTCHKISS** — When Sarah Pope started the North Fork Seed Library in 2013, her goal was to educate patrons about seed saving and ignite a passion for growing their own favorite varieties of heirloom vegetables.

But in the past four years, the participation in the seed library has built a catalog of the harvests donated by local gardeners, and the project has bloomed to build a community of knowledge and expertise.

While seed libraries have popped up in many locations and have different methods of organizing the seeds, the purpose is the same — to provide a collection of seeds to lend to members.



ERIN MCINTYRE

They're different than seed banks — which largely exist to preserve viable seeds that are in danger of going extinct. Pope's seed library accepts deposits of seed that has been saved by patrons at the end of each season, to keep the collection going and complete the circle of seed saving and seed lending.

The pilot program started at the Hotchkiss branch, was in full swing by 2014, and has since spread to all five of the Delta County Libraries' locations.

In Hotchkiss, where it all started, the seed library is housed in a blue tower, a repurposed microfiche cabinet that holds rows of seed packets, organized according to how difficult the seeds are to save.

Some seeds are pretty easy to grow and save — like beans and peas. But other seeds are classified as more advanced, such as Tigger melons, yellow rutabagas or birdhouse gourds.

Knowledge of how the different varieties grow and reproduce comes in handy for seed savers. Details such as knowing that onions, carrots and cabbages are biennials, meaning they require two growing seasons to complete their life cycles and produce seed, come in handy. Most gardeners harvest these vegetables before they go to seed, when they're ready to eat but not seed-mature,



ERIN MCINTYRE/The Daily Sentinel

Sarah Pope flips through a number of seed packets in the North Fork Seed Library, which she started in 2013. Growers who have success with certain crops can add their seeds to the library, and also leave notes specific to growing the plants involved.

and that's one of the reasons they're classified as more difficult in the seed library catalog.

The seed library doesn't replace a seed company — not every variety of tomato is available, and the varieties here reflect donations from community gardeners who had successful crops. For that reason, the seed library's catalog is an ever-changing, dynamic reflection of what performed well in a particular year, as well as the varieties that were well-suited for the weather, climate and soils. All the varieties are open-pollinated, making more predictable seed saving possible, rather than hybrid varieties, which won't produce "true" from generation to generation. Though there is a chance that varieties could cross-pollinate, the donors to the seed library can note methods they used to prevent this

from happening to the seeds they've contributed (isolating the plants from others that could pollinate them or only planting one variety of beans, for example).

Pope, who moved to the North Fork Valley in 2009 to farm, loves growing different varieties of beans. Some are heritage varieties, like Golden Anasazis, and others are just cool to grow and eat, like Pink Floyd beans. The catalog currently has 231 different varieties of seed packets, searchable online at the library's website, [deltalibraries.org](http://deltalibraries.org).

Gardeners love to share stories with each other and with Pope about their star-favorites each year. It's a learning experience and some trials are more successful than others — but that's part of the fun and the collection benefits overall from these uber-local trials.

"When we save seeds

that all seeds will be on the shelf for checkout by March 1 each year, and that means staffers and volunteers spend January sorting and packaging the seeds, and then cataloging them in February.

Roughly 1,000 packets were checked out in the first month of this season, Pope said.

Though the library is popular among locals, curious gardeners from outside Delta County have traveled to visit the seed library and check out seeds, too. One Colorado Springs man drove to Hotchkiss in February, only to find out he was a few days early for the season debut of the seeds and they weren't quite ready yet.

One of the other benefits of the seed library is the exchange of knowledge between patrons, though their identities are protected by the library's privacy rules.

These anonymous seed savers can leave notes or tips for future growers, which are printed on the packets for others to consult the next season. Comments like, "Really tasty!" and "Grows better than store-bought seeds of the same kind," encourage the next gardener to check packets out and give this kind a try.

As the seed librarian, Pope's favorite thing is listening to the stories that come with the seeds and the gardeners, the history behind the varieties and seeds that have been passed down through families for generations.

"Some of them have really incredible stories and our next step is to start collecting those as well," she said. For her, the seed library is an important way she can serve the patrons and take advantage of the agricultural roots in the community.

"Libraries are really transforming," Pope said. "We're not just about books, it's about meeting the community's needs."

The seed library will continue to change over time and expand to collect and distribute what the community needs — whether it's vegetables, flowers, education or experience. Pope is enthusiastic about sharing all of those things, and has one bit of advice for anyone interested in giving this a try.

"Pick your favorite things to grow in the garden and figure out how to save the seeds," Pope said. "It's a great place to start."

HOME

Have a weed problem? Pre-emergent is a good start.

I have a lot of weeds in my yard and every spring and it seems like I'm spraying all the time. Is there something I can do to prevent this problem?

I think I have a pre-emergent you, at least partially, weed killers called pre-emergents work by killing seed without affecting the garden. These are on annuals that are g



DENNIS HILL

weeds you may have. Bermuda grass.

In your lawn, shrub the product we like is Ornamental Weed and Containing Dimensional mouthful). It's a granule out and then water used it in my yard and percent of my annual

You'll want to apply needs to go on before nated — once you see work and you'll have spray with a post-emergent. Typically, our recommendation is to apply it down when the frost is around town, which is now. Don't neglect to Pre-emergents can be applied if not washed in dimension is much more other pre-emergents, more complete weed the hose out and water

With some annuals that can germinate over several months, you'll need a second application in

All this works fine shrub beds. The problem we're putting things in the garden. Almost all pre-emergents are (including dimension use around edible plants for ornamentals. The chemical product I've used is Preen garden weed label does have a section on table gardens. However, this product is pretty good need to water it in well

One thing to remember is that pre-emergent is that it impedes the germination of the weeds and your vegetables means is that you should pre-emergent after you've well-germinated (not since the annual weeds will germinate at the same time as the garden from transplants

The only other product about is an organic pre-emergent called corn gluten meal. This product is made from the product of the corn and corn syrup and is used for use in vegetables in well after application to allow the garden to grow after this. It's not a pre-emergent, but I guess it's reduced weed by 60 percent, but I guess it's not doing anything at all! At the

IN BRIEF SENTINEL STAFF

## Library hosting beekeeping talk

The latest presentation in the Mesa County Library's "Beyond the Garden" series is backyard beekeeping for beginners, at 6:30 p.m. on April 5 at the main branch. Beekeeper Amanda Quigley will give explain the first steps

## Gardening for seniors presentation scheduled

Kathy Kimbrough, owner of Garden Scentsations and a trained master gardener, will present "Gardening for Seniors: Making Gardening Easy and Enjoyable" at 6:30 p.m. Tuesday at the Mesa County Library's main branch.