



Saving seeds the desi way

Eco-friendly
and at no cost

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Seeds are the life of farming systems. Farmers depend more on seeds than on fertilizers, pesticides or any other inputs. This is because it is vital to obtain 90 per cent sprouting and when the quality of seed is good, there are no concerns of good germination.

Farmers pick out the best seeds out of standing crops and save them systematically. In the past they used traditional methods to conserve them but in the current scenario, they use the various chemical powders available in the market to preserve seeds. Additionally, the government distributes seeds every year and the need to protect and conserve seeds is not seen.

TRADITION

After the Green Revolution and the large scale use of hybrid seeds, most traditional varieties of seeds and crops have disappeared. While it is true that hybrid seeds give more yields in the beginning, the use of chemical fertilizers results in reduced crops after a few years and leaves the farmers in crisis situations.

To salvage this situation, it is important to use eco-friendly agricultural methods through revival of our indigenous knowledge. The only way to do this is by protecting traditional seed varieties as local seeds give equal and sometimes greater yields than hybrid varieties. It is possible however, that these seeds can be destroyed when conserved with chemical treatment.

In small villages, people still practice indigenous methods. An example is Honnalli village in Aland taluk of Gulbarga district. It has about 80 families, most of whom are agriculturists. Women farmers of this village have adopted traditional seed storage systems. 'Bayalu Seeme Rural Development System' (BSRDS), an NGO, working for sustainable agriculture implementation, is encouraging the farmers to follow such methods.

BOTTLE GOURD

Bottle Gourd, called as *sore kaayi*, is a commonly known vegetable. It has many uses. Children in villages are taught to swim by tying a dried bottle gourd on to their backs to prevent them from drowning. Dried bottle gourds are also used to preserve seeds. The procedure is simple. The gourd is first sun dried. A hole is then made at one edge and the seeds and dried flesh are scooped out. Urad, sesame, green gram seeds etc are then poured into the gourd through the hole. The hole is then closed with a mixture of cow dung and mud. The seeds preserved in this manner can be protected from insects for three to four years. When monsoon arrives, and the farmers prepare their lands, they open the bottle gourd by removing the mud cap and remove the seeds for sowing. Ambamma says, "We have been using this storage method for seeds for decades and have never had any problems."

GALIGE

In Koppal and Raichur district, farmers use a method known as 'Galige'. A *galige* is made from the leaves of wild palm and is shaped like a mud pot. Tribal communities weave the *galige* and it can usually hold from 10 kilos to a quintal. One part of red soil is mixed with two parts of cow dung and water. The mixture is pasted on the outer surface of the *galige*. It is then sundried for two days.

The *galige* is used to protect seeds such as urad, horse gram, green gram, red gram, winged beans etc. Before putting the seeds into the *galige* they are dried in the sun. Leaves of castor and neem are placed in the bottom of the *galige* and seeds poured in thereafter. The top is again covered with neem and castor and the mouth of the *galige* sealed with mud and cow dung mixture. This effectively protects the seeds from pests, insects and rats. Seeds can be preserved in a *galige* for up to two years.

The *galige* is opened in the winter to examine the health of the seeds. In the event of insect or pest attack, they are dried in the sun again and placed back. The mouth of the *galige* is sealed once again.

BALATHA

The *balatha* is a simple structure. It consists of a bamboo stick, one end of which is buried in the ground. Two ends of a bamboo mat are tied vertically to the bamboo to resemble a cylinder. Large quantities of paddy seeds are poured into the cylinder and the mouth covered with gunny bags. Some *galathas* can hold up to 25 quintals of seed.

There are some other unique methods of preserving seeds. Cucumber and water melon seeds are mixed with ash and water. Limestone is mixed with Tovar seeds, particularly in Gulbarga district where limestone is available in plenty. Sesame seeds can be preserved better when mixed with castor seeds.

With the introduction of the Green Revolution however, several indigenous techniques have been lost to us. Farmers have begun to use chemicals to preserve seeds without being aware of the hazards that arise from them. It is probably the appropriate time to understand that saving seeds the *desi* way is not only eco-friendly; it also does not cost anything.

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