

New England's First Seed Library

By Will Rowlands

A BIG PART of the green movement is the rediscovery of local, organic food sources. They never really disappeared, of course, we just forgot about them.

Now, farmer's markets and farm-to-table events are popping up everywhere as the locavore movement gains traction. And why not? It's good for our health AND it's good for the local economy.

A lesser-known facet of the green revolution is a return to organic, heirloom seeds.

Perhaps one day we'll have a Connecticut Seed Bank but, for now, we'll fill you in on one of the pioneers in this realm ... the Seed-to-Seed Library at the Fairfield Woods Branch Library in Fairfield.

Their seed-to-seed library, now in its third year, offers free seeds to everyone and they have hundreds of vegetables, flowers and herbs from which to choose.

Mary Coe and Nancy Coriaty work at the library. They're both into sustainability and got to talking one day about what they could do at the library. "Why not start a seed library?" they thought. Why not indeed? The first seed library in New England, their brainchild, was the result.

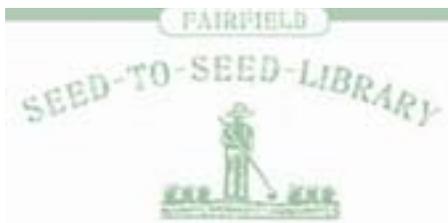
It took them a while to work out the details. Both Mary and Nancy managed to get grants that helped them buy the cabinets that hold the seeds. The money also helped them line up a kickoff speaker (Tovah Martin) and buy some seeds.

Why Grow & Save Seeds?

- Save money
- Help develop seed stock that's adapted to local conditions
- Lessen our dependence on agribusiness because germplasm and biodiversity remain in public hands and is free to all comers.
- Participating in a seed library creates a culture of sharing and abundance.

They also consulted with the Richmond Grows Seed Library (www.richmondgrowsseeds.org) which, we understand, was the sixth of its kind in the country and one of the first located in a public library.

With the basics worked out, the Fairfield Seed-to-Seed Library opened for business in April 2011.



Their goal? "To have every household in Fairfield plant a garden. We are committed to increasing community awareness of the benefits of gardening and saving seeds through education that will foster community resilience, self-reliance and a culture of sharing."

They have a long way to go but they've made a good start. In 2013, they had almost 100 patrons.

Significantly, 2013 also saw the first return of seeds back to the library.

'Going Fungal'

The Richmond operation began in 2010 and there are now more than 90 across the country. Some proponents say the idea is "going fungal."

Whether you call it a seed bank, seed exchange or seed library, it seems like a natural for public libraries who are always looking for new ways to engage people in an age saturated with 24/7 media and electronic entertainment.

How It Works

You go to the library, register (name and email suffices), decide what seeds you want and note what you've taken. You take a few seeds, put them in an envelope and you're on your way. It's that simple ... and it's free.

You don't need a library card. You don't even need to be a resident of Fairfield. The seed library is located on the first floor, not far from the information desk.

Ideally, you'll return some seeds back to them eventually but that's not a requirement of the program, and you won't be fined. They don't want gardeners to feel pressured.

They thought about stocking heirloom seeds but decided it might



Photo / Will Rowlands

The seed-to-seed library at the Fairfield Woods Branch Library.

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be too much for some people. They are, however, organic. The seeds they have are organic and they expect you to return organic seeds. It's on the honor system, nobody is going to be checking up on you!

The project is slowly gaining momentum. They're working with a number of local groups, some of whom donate their time to the effort. Comstock, Ferre & Co. in Wethersfield is now donating seeds to the project. New seeds are brought in every year.

The seed library supplies the seeds for gardens at local schools and they're working with Eric Frisk at the Fairfield Community Garden to develop educational events and demonstrations. The library has even been a pickup site for Sport Hill Farm's CSA deliveries.

Mary and Nancy get inquiries from all over the country from people interested in what they're doing and how they do it. A story on the seed library even ran in the July 2013 edition of

KAIZEN, a French magazine.

They're moving forward on several fronts and are creating a network of like-minded individuals and groups as they go. The seed-to-seed library has a selection of gardening-related materials and cognoscenti such as Bill Duesing, Sal Gilbertie and Nick Mancini have come in to speak.

The Fairfield Woods Branch Library is the busiest branch library in Connecticut and we're happy to report that they're one of the many libraries that subscribe to *Connecticut Gardener*. They're located at 1147 Fairfield Woods Road, Fairfield, CT 06825.

If you have questions, you can email Mary Coe at mcoe@fplct.org or Nancy Coriaty at ncoriaty@fplct.org. You can also call them at (203) 255-7308.

Check them out online at <http://fairfieldpubliclibrary.org/branch/going-green-at-the-branch/> or on their wikispace at <http://seedlibrary.wikispaces.com>



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