

Seedy Saturday Lewes 4th February 2017

Emma Chaplin speaks to Cristina Blandino of the Millennium Seed Bank at Wakehurst Place

What do you do at the Seed Bank? I'm a PhD student learning to become a seed ecologist. Seed ecologists are interested in the conditions that lead to germination - which depends on the season, the temperature and the dormancy. I'm one of a network of 11 European-funded students from around the world. Some are based at the Seed Bank, others are based with native seed producers. The aim is to bridge the gap between the seed industry and seed science.

What do you mean? Seeds have precise requirements to survive. You get poor seeds when they've not been preserved and stored properly. Our aim is to provide guidelines to improve the quality of commercial native wild species.

What may people be surprised to learn? Some can't be dried. Acorns can only be kept frozen in liquid hydrogen, for example.

What's your favourite seed and why? *Ruscus aculeatus* (butchers broom) is an enigma. It seems like a remnant of a past era, before the last glacial era, when Europe was more subtropical. Nothing eats the fruits. Whatever once did is now extinct or no longer lives in Europe.

What's the easiest seed to grow? Something that has no dormancy, like calendula or cress.

How can people best take care of their seeds? Keep them in a cool, dark place. Their life depends on the species, the quality, when they were harvested and how they were treated. Seeds are moist when you collect them, but they need to be dried quickly and properly. They deteriorate when damp. At the Seed Bank we have controlled humidity. The rooms are air and water tight. Once the seeds are sufficiently dry, we keep them frozen at 20 degrees, but you can't do that at home.

Are there male and female seeds? It depends on the species. Stinging nettles and marijuana plants, for example, have male and female parts, and only the female part produces seeds. The male part produces pollen. Roses and geraniums have male and female organs in the same flower.

What do you think about seeds of species that go extinct - should they be reintroduced? It depends on the situation. As with animals, if they became extinct because their habitat was polluted, and that hasn't been remedied, they will just die again. You have to ensure the conditions are right for their survival. In the meantime, the seeds should remain

banked and their germination should be studied. Plus they should be grown around the world in botanical gardens, to replenish the seeds, because seeds age.

Cristina will be talking about seed saving at the eleventh annual Lewes Seedy Saturday, alongside Jo Carter, who will be discussing Wildflower Lewes. Other talks include Growing Fungi by Rich Wright of the Feed Bristol Project. Also, willow weaving workshops, tool sharpening demonstrations, children's activities and homemade food.

**Sat 4, Lewes Town Hall, 10am-3pm, adults £1, children free
commoncause.org.uk/seedy-saturday**