



HOW TO ORGANIZE A

seed & plant SWAP

A Nabolagshager community guide

placecity
oslo•vienna



Welcome to Nabolagshager's guide to seed and plant swaps

How can people, nature, and cities connect in a meaningful way? Through founding the company Nabolagshager I have explored a range of issues related to greener and more social cities over several years; all centered around creating spaces for biodiversity and friendly conversations where concrete and asphalt dominate. We hosted our first seed swap in 2015 and have since explored swaps for garden plants and houseplants too.

What we see, again and again, is that connecting over plants, greenery, and biodiversity is extremely effective and powerful for kickstarting conversations on community and nature, even on a scale of our living room or balcony.

Through this guide, we want to share our insights from the plant and seed swaps we have organized over the years. We hope that the guide inspires you to experiment with your organization or community to create connections between people and nature on the micro and macro scale. If you decide to host your own plant or seed swaps we would love to hear how it went!

Enjoy!



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OPENSOURCE CONTENT

The content is opensource and you are free to build on, adapt and reuse the inspiration for your own activities, credits to Nabolagshager are still appreciated. :-)

THE PLACEMAKING EUROPE TOOLBOX

The publication is part of the Placemaking Europe Toolbox, a common platform to share public space resources from our extensive network, that can be adaptable across contexts. The toolbox is a "one stop page" to find ideas to apply to your project or community.

For more info and other tools, see www.placemaking-europe.eu

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ABOUT NABOLAGSHAGER

Nabolagshager is a think-and-do tank that works with the social aspects of sustainable, urban development. As social entrepreneurs, we work with people, planet, and profit to make cities greener and more social. In our work we participate in research projects and conduct social programming, while also obtaining funding from our services and products.



KEY AREAS OF EXPERTISE

- Manage living labs and co-creation processes to increase community input and participation.
- Run pioneer projects in urban agriculture such as beekeeping and rooftop farming.
- Develop and execute citizen science projects together with academic partners.
- Enable an entrepreneurial environment, support start-ups, explore business models. Creating green jobs, targeting marginalized youth.
- Support cities and regions in their transition towards sustainability and the green economy through policy and practice.

Learn more by visiting www.nabolagshager.no or [@nabolagshager](https://www.instagram.com/nabolagshager) on social media.

A COMMUNITY GET-TOGETHER

or a political protest manifested through kindness and sharing?

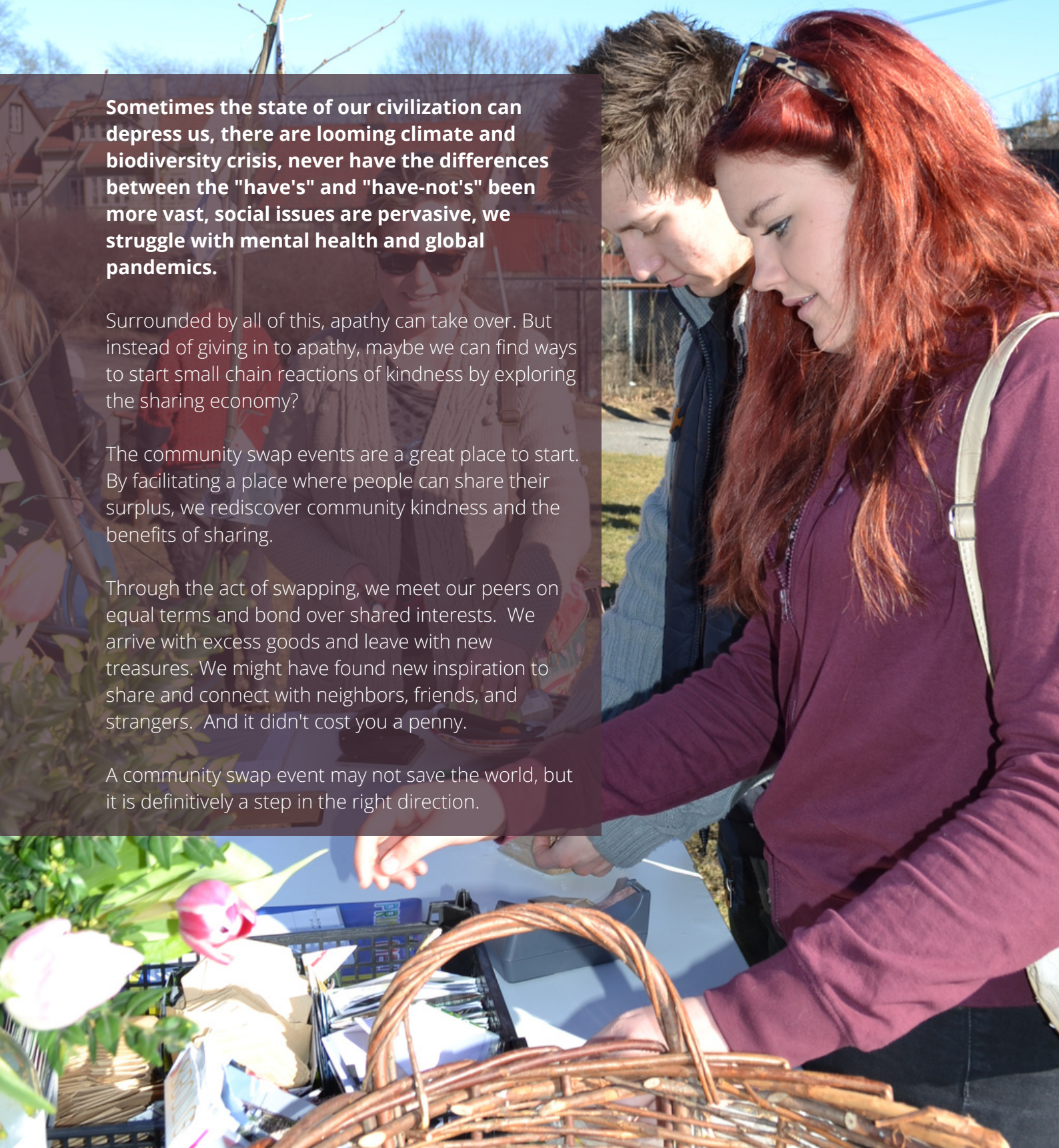
Sometimes the state of our civilization can depress us, there are looming climate and biodiversity crisis, never have the differences between the "have's" and "have-not's" been more vast, social issues are pervasive, we struggle with mental health and global pandemics.

Surrounded by all of this, apathy can take over. But instead of giving in to apathy, maybe we can find ways to start small chain reactions of kindness by exploring the sharing economy?

The community swap events are a great place to start. By facilitating a place where people can share their surplus, we rediscover community kindness and the benefits of sharing.

Through the act of swapping, we meet our peers on equal terms and bond over shared interests. We arrive with excess goods and leave with new treasures. We might have found new inspiration to share and connect with neighbors, friends, and strangers. And it didn't cost you a penny.

A community swap event may not save the world, but it is definitely a step in the right direction.



Seed and plant swaps *build skills and community*

This is a guide for hosting swap meets for either seeds, vegetable/garden plants or houseplants. At Nabolagshager, one of our most successful community-building events, have been these plant and seed swap meetups. We have gathered our experiences in this booklet to encourage others to set up their own swapping activities.

During intense events lasting only an hour or two, more than ten thousand seeds or several hundred plants routinely change owners. As you enter the venue, the seeds or plants you have brought along are traded for tickets, one for each item. These tickets are your currency of the day; - no cash is needed. All incoming tradeable resources are pooled so the swap is not person to person, but person to community to person.



While rummaging through seed packages or sorting through plant babies up for grabs, we observe that people smile at and strike up conversations with strangers, ask questions and share tips and tricks. For any questions on plant care that may emerge, we provide an 'experts corner' where you can sit down in a deep sofa and flip through gardening encyclopedias or ask one of the designated experts about advice on how to care for your new plant babies or how to cultivate your new seeds.

As you leave, you "pay" for the number of plants or seed packets that you have selected, with the tickets you got when you entered. Inclusiveness is at the heart of the event; you don't need either money nor skills to be a valuable participant. and everybody leaves with huge smiles on their faces, and bags full of treasures - all without having spent a penny.

These events can be hosted anywhere and are amazing for bringing people together. The swaps can also be a part of a more complex placemaking strategy, or simply to identify and build a network of people interested in urban greening in your community.



Your one-day ticket to the sharing economy

The key to these events are the tradeable tickets that function as the currency for the day. For each item you bring to the swap, you are given one ticket to use for paying. Using money is simply not an option!

As you enter the venue, your seed packets or baby plants are traded for tickets. It does not matter if it is a large bag of seeds or a recent, un-rooted plant cutting, only. Five items give 5 tickets, Ten plants give 10 tickets. These tickets then function as your currency during the event. The only purpose of the tickets is to "buy" the items that other attendees have brought. The attendee finds a number of items equal to your number of tickets, and "pay" with these tickets as they leave.

These tickets ensure the egalitarian trading platform of the events, and spread the idea that there are some things that money can't buy but that you can trade or swap with your community. It also demonstrates very clearly the value of sharing within a community. And for the hosts, it gives us an easy way to track our impact, by counting how many tickets were given out during the event. These tickets can be regular raffle tickets, it's a benefit if they are numbered so you as the host can tally up the number of swaps realized, after the event.

An alternative way to organize the events could be through bartering, where plant donor and plant receiver exchange plants directly with each other. This can work well if there are only a handful of attendees, and if they each bring only a handful of plants. It is our experience that attendees bring anything from three to 150 items, so there is simply not enough time to have such person-to-person negotiations for each transaction.

For many attendees, this is their first encounter with the sharing economy. However, as they leave the venue, you will see a lot of people being very enthusiastic about these kinds of encounters, about the wealth, you discovered you had simply by sharing with your community. The community swaps thereby promote not only plant sharing but also solidarity, mutualism, equity, participation, democracy, pluralism, and sustainability, to name a few side-effects.

"(...) it's only through sharing, cooperation, and contribution to the common good that it's possible to create lives and a world worth having. And herein lay the engine of the sharing transformation:

When individuals embrace sharing as a worldview and practice, they experience a new, enlivening way to be in the world. Sharing heals the painful disconnect we feel within ourselves, with each other, and the places we love.

Sharing opens a channel to our creative potential. It is fun, practical, and perhaps most of all, it's empowering. And sharing enables us to experience and do things we never thought possible."

www.shareable.net

SHAREABLE

Sharing our secrets for a successful swap meet



Start planning early *for maximum impact*

START PLANNING 6-8 WEEKS BEFORE THE EVENT

It is important to start planning and spreading this event at the very least 6-8 weeks before the event day. You should go public at least 4-6 weeks prior to the event. This allows the event to build a network of partners and co-organizers and spread the word of the event. Even more importantly, it gives the attendees (and you) the time to sow extra seeds or propagate extra seedlings in due time to have something to swap.

A 1-HOUR PLANT BLIZZARD

Through trial and error, we have concluded that the perfect length of the event is one hour. A shorter event is more effective, as it forces people to arrive at the same time, and creates an intense buzz. During a longer event, people tire and leave early, and for a long period towards the end of the event, it feels like you are arriving at a buffet five minutes before closing time; all the good stuff is gone.

Beware that people often arrive early to get the best pick of tradeables, work that into your event; the long line outside the venue with people carrying plants, waiting for the door to open, is a great photo opportunity.

BUILD ANTICIPATION ONLINE AND OFFLINE

In the period between publishing the event, and the event day, work proactively with your social media. Plan to publish posts on your main SoMe channels about the event and also on the facebook event itself. You can create posts on green thumb skills and

gardeners' tricks related to the swap. If it is a seed swap event, share links about seed saving. If it is a plant swap for vegetable plants, share urban farming links. If it is a swap for plant cuttings and propagated plants, include how-to links for different types of indoor plants.

Make a list of relevant locally popular hashtags regarding plants, sharing economy, sustainable lifestyles, and similar. Identify your local bloggers and SoMe heroes that are engaged in plants and gardening. By tagging them, DM'ing or linking to blogposts from them you may trigger their curiosity and them spreading the event.

You can also make posters and flyers and spread in your community to enhance the invitation dissemination; it depends on your time availability, and what strategies you find most relevant for your target audience. If you prepare event posters, take the time to visit a wide range of places where potential plant swap attendees would hang out, including local cafés, on community bulletin boards, at local institutions such as senior citizen activity centers or at the entrance door of local supermarkets and other local shops (ask for permission by the manager).

Don't forget to post to community facebook groups, WhatsApp groups and other digital community boards!

Find your hashtags

so your local plant lovers can find you



#greenlife

#ecofriendly

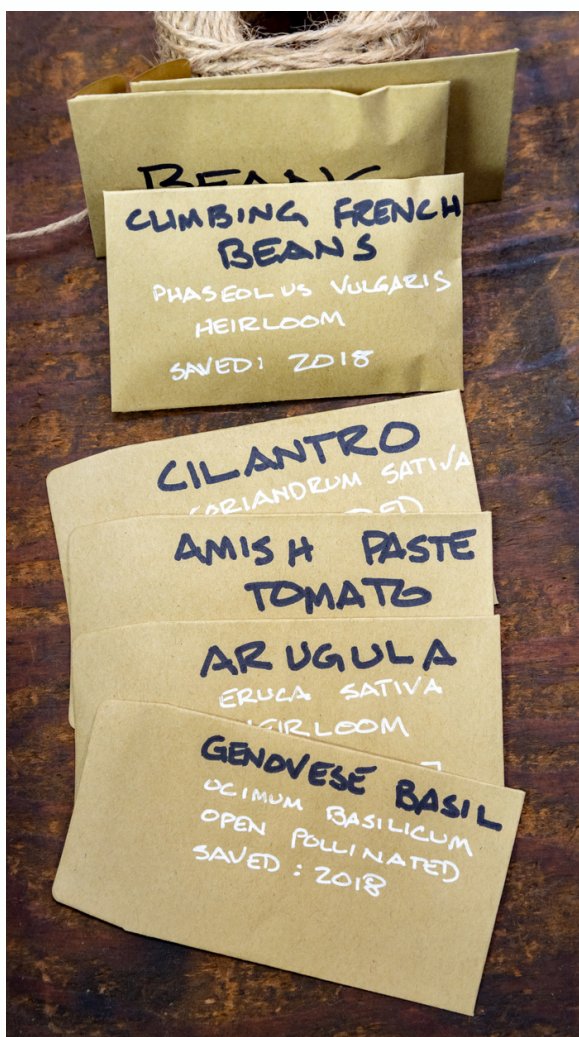
#sharingiscaring

#plantsmakepeoplehappy

#urbangardenersrepublic

Convert seeds into a *community currency*

The seeds brought into a seed swap can come from anywhere, either be seeds harvested by the gardener, leftover seeds from last years gardening endeavours, or spare seeds from a seed package you have bought this year, that you don't expect to spend yourself.



SHARING SURPLUS SEEDS

A regular seed package bought at a florist, garden center or grocery store, is designed for gardeners and farmers on the medium scale. A packet of lettuce or carrot seeds, for instance, can often contain thousands of seeds, far more than what most urban gardeners will use in a lifetime.

By sharing your extra seeds at a seed swap, you get other varieties for your own garden! And by buying only one type of herb seeds, you can trade your way to a whole spice rack! Through its activities, a seed swap will demonstrate seed appreciation and encourage exploring the bounty of these free resources that exist right under our noses! Seeds harvested in local gardens are also sure to be adapted to local climatic and soil conditions.

PRO TIPS

- Remind the swappers to label all seed packets clearly.
- Encourage users to put at least ten seeds in each package, and to throw in some extra for good karma!

Your neighborhood is full of free seeds

PRO TIP:

Seeds should be stored in clearly labeled paper envelopes. Then put these packets in a box, somewhere dark and dry. If you curl up a couple of coffee filters in the seed box, they will absorb excess moisture.



Seeds can be harvested in your own garden, from flowers growing in public parks and flower beds and from your friends' gardens. Ask first before harvesting seeds from private gardens and allotments, as the owner may have his or her own plan for these seeds. And stay away from botanical gardens!

Some seeds are found directly on the dried plant or flower, some require that you go through some processes to obtain a dry seed you can save for next year. The Internet has ample resources to learn how to find, harvest, and save your own seeds.

The events should seek to actively share knowledge about seed saving as an important biodiversity- and community building activity. If the main organizer does not have any seed saving know-how, it is highly encouraged to team up with a local gardening association, environmental NGO, faculty of plant sciences, or botany club. Most countries and regions also have a seed savers' association that actively work to promote seed proficiency.

Co-organizers, community partners and volunteers



Bring the community on board

To ensure a positive impact, we strive to reach a wide audience in these events, and partnering with other organizations is key. The co-organizers should include organizations that cater to different demographics. Examples of relevant co-organizations can be local gardening associations, senior groups, environmental NGOs, and other community groups.

At least one of the co-organizers should have significant plant knowledge, as they can take the role of hosting an “expert’s corner”. You may also consider inviting corporate sponsors or district/ municipal partners if you find it will work in your context. If your community has a seed library, it is a good idea to invite them as it is a great way for the swapping to continue beyond the event.

A plant or seed swap is a great media opportunity so select one or two local media that you may think could be interested in this story, find the name of the journalists in charge of local feelgood stories and contact them.



HOW TO ORGANIZE A SEED & PLANT SWAP



Suggestions for a smooth event collaboration

SOME TOPICS TO DISCUSS WITH YOUR CO-HOSTS DURING THE PLANNING OF YOUR EVENT

- Agree on a time and date for the event, ensure that it does not coincide with other events they are organizing.
- Venue; do the partners have facilities that can host the event at no/low cost?
- Will you prepare and share a communications package with poster, flyers etc with the co-organizers so this can be distributed locally, and in their networks? If so, agree on a timeline for dissemination.
- Do the co-hosts want their logos on information material? How should they be tagged in social media; do we use certain hashtags, or link to webpages?
- Agree on a strategy for spreading invitations to the event. Do we expect co-organizers to invite their members, networks, and friends? Do we expect co-organizers to mention the event on their social media, webpage or newsletters? A minimum should be to agree that all co-hosts post the event on their social media and/or website.
- Agree on the role and expectations of the volunteers coming from the co-organizers before the event day, based on their skills related to plants and seeds.
- Get the contact information for these volunteers, and their preferred channel of communication. A group of senior citizens might prefer getting their information by phone or post rather than e-mail, teenagers might not be active on facebook, etc.
- Do the co-hosts want to use the event day to spread any material, invite for other events etc? Do they require facilities for their materials, such as a table or seating?
- Media coverage: Do the co-hosts have any useful media contacts? Do they expect to be mentioned in a media story, and are they realistic about their newsworthiness as co-organizers?



ON THE EVENT DAY

- Be sure that the volunteers are ready a minimum of 30 minutes before the event starts. Brief them thoroughly on the process, how the swapping works, where people should go as they enter, how to count their tradeables, how the "payment" with tickets is done, etc. The moment of opening the doors is the busiest and the volunteers need to be ready for this.
- Provide name tags, event t-shirts, or similar so that attendees know who to ask when they have questions. Ensure that the volunteers know that any plant related questions will be channeled to the "experts' corner" to avoid bottlenecks at the entry/ exit point.
- After closing, wrap up the day, be sure to thank the volunteers, and take note of their suggestions for improvements for the next community swap event. If you have a budget for it, ending the event with a bite of food is always a good suggestion :-)



A community calendar *for sharing seeds, vegetable plants and house plants*

We recommend scheduling differently themed events throughout the year, and actively using one event for recruiting for the next.

Seed swaps for the end of winter adapted to your climatic conditions and seasons. More experienced gardeners often prefer these to take place earlier in the winter, as they plan their season well ahead. Novice gardeners usually aren't focussed on spring's sowing until the early weeks of spring, when it may be too late to sow many vegetables. The sweet spot might be towards the end of your winter.

Vegetable plant swaps are organized for 4-10 weeks after the seed swap, around mid-spring, so that people who attended the seed swap can share their excess baby plants. These can also be repeated. You may also want to host an additional event at the end of spring, as many find they have too many plants at this time.

Houseplant swaps can happen any time during the year.



Plan for an efficient attendee flow

Planning the venue space for a seed swap

- Entry point
- Tables + signs
- Ample volunteer space on one side of the tables
- Attendee space on the other side of the tables
- Exit space (can be the same as the entry point)



Along the tables, volunteers are on one side, and attendees on the other side. On top of the tables, there are signs marking different plant families; being 1) salad greens, 2) herbs, 3) peas and beans, 4) root vegetables, 5) cabbage family, 6) edible flowers, 7) onions, 8) tomatoes, chilis, and peppers, 9) cucumbers, squash, pumpkins, and similar, and 10) other.



At the entrance, 1-2 volunteers count the seed envelopes, and trade them for tickets. The seed envelopes are collected in a larger bin behind the counter. A group of event volunteers grabs stacks of seed envelopes from this bin. These volunteers need to have some plant knowledge, enough to be able to identify in which category the seeds belong. They grab these incoming seeds and distribute them by category. The attendees can then shop in the different seed envelope piles, and pick packets they want to "buy" with their tickets. Once they are happy with their selection, they approach the volunteer(s) by the exit, let them count the number of seed packages they are "buying", hand in the equivalent number of tickets, and leave the venue. Used tickets are discarded.



Planning the venue of a plant swap

- Entry point
- Several tables
- Ample attendee space on either side of the tables
- Exit space (can be the same as the entry point)



The venue design for a plant swap is easier, as is the need for volunteers and their skills. At the entrance, volunteers count the plants the attendees are bringing, and handing out the equivalent number of tickets. The attendees then bring their plants to the tables and spread them out where they find space for them. Attendees then shop around the tables until they find plants they want themselves, that they "pay" for at the exit with their tickets.





Troubleshooting

We have gathered our suggested answers to some of the frequently asked questions that we get. Hopefully, this will help you as you plan your own community event!

I don't have anything to swap, can I still come?

There will always be people asking if they can come even if they don't have any plants or seeds. To them our answer is always that to swap, one must bring something to get something. However, it is our experience that some people bring more plants or seeds than what they take back, and they prefer to donate their extra tickets. We then informally redistribute these extra tickets "under the table" to people we think will enjoy them, for example, young children attending the event. When people ask if they can buy items, we tell them that this is a strictly bartering event with no cash involved.

I brought really nice plants and only got mediocre ones back

Some people will feel that they brought very nice plants, and got lower-quality plants in return. This is particularly true to those that arrive toward the end of the event when a lot of the good stuff has left the event. While this is quite unavoidable, we can take some measures. To ensure that also latecomers have some good stuff to choose from, we as hosts prepare a secret batch of tradeable goods that we only bring out 15 minutes before closing time, as our contributions to the event. This can be 50 seed envelopes of some interesting and not-so-common seeds, 20 rare tomato plants, or 20 well-rooted cuttings from our office plants, for example.

There is a huge line of people waiting to get in, should we open the doors early?

No, we never open the doors early. The last moments before we let in are important for preparing volunteers for what is at hand. However, we can get a head start by starting to go through the line, outside of the door, counting plants/ seed packets, and giving out tickets, so that people can move quickly into the room and share their tradeable goods once the doors open.



HOW TO ORGANIZE A PLANT & SEED SWAP



I come unprepared!

Some people will arrive at a seed swap with their seeds not ready to be swapped, needing space and material to make seed envelopes, and we should facilitate this. Make sure there is a designated space for this, and one volunteer who can be at this table showing how it is done. As seed envelopes are made and filled, they must go to the entrance to have them counted to get their tickets. Some also come with a lot of plants in one container and need to split them into smaller units to get their fair share of currency tickets. A quick fix is providing paper towels that they can moisten and wrap the baby plant to ensure that they don't dry out during the event.

Can I swap other things?

We keep the different formats separate, so we don't accept seed swapping at a plant swap, and vice versa. But if someone comes to a plant cuttings swap with a tomato plant, we don't mind. And no, we don't accept trading compost, eggs, or anything else at the events, we prefer to keep the concept to one thing at a time.

It's raining!

These swaps can be held indoors or outdoors depending on your climatic conditions. However, we recommend that plant swaps organized in colder months are held indoors, as plants can be sensitive to low outdoor temperatures. If you plan to hold the event outdoors, pay attention to the weather forecast, and make contingency plans. Seed swaps, if held early in the season, can also be chilly, and seed envelopes are prone to flying away if there is wind! To keep the seed envelopes from flying, we provide large baskets and boxes for each seed category.

I'm hungry!

We are sometimes asked if there will be food and drinks available at the event. However, it is our experience that people come and leave with their hands full of plants, and are not that interested in catering or a food truck, especially since it is a short event! However, if there is space to sit down, it might work. When we have organized the event together with a bar with a terrace, we did notice that many sat down to have a drink and "talk plants" with their friends after finishing the trading.

Living it up as a *seed millionaire*



PRO TIP:

Make a special effort to reach out to low-income groups such as students and senior citizens with your event invitations. This is a great opportunity to prepare for a whole summer of low-cost activities, and a bountiful harvest in due time.

Open source seeds

the roots and the future of civilization

When humanity went from hunter-gatherers to farmers, it was because we had cracked the code of how to save the seeds from plants of one season, to plant them for the next. Out of this, modern societies with agriculture, settlements, democracies and even urban life were born.

The simple act of saving seeds from one season to the next, is intimately connected to how our societies have developed. Trading seeds with each other has followed in the footsteps, and helped us develop new cultivars along the way.

Our swap meets have been inspired by the global movement to protect the rights of amateur gardeners to freely swap seeds, and more directly by the “Frie Frø” (“freedom seeds”) seed swaps organized by Copenhagen-based “Seeds and Urban Farming” across Scandinavia.

The right to swap seeds from your own plants is continuously threatened in the EU and globally as only a handful of multinational seed companies are in control of more and more of all seed varieties available, through DNA-mapping, patenting, lobbying and aggressive business models.

Grassroot organizations, communities, farmers and urban gardeners are mobilizing to ensure that the seed rights remain in the public realm. Seed swaps, seed libraries and encouraging the use of opensource heirloom seeds are key strategies to engage the public in saving and sharing their own seeds.

The movement shares many traits with the “open source” IT movement, and is also closely related to the maker community, slow food, and environmental movement.

Build on the event enthusiasm
*by inviting to the next swap
already as people leave the venue*



The PlaceCity project

Placemaking for sustainable, thriving cities

Nabolagshager, in cooperation with a number of international partners, is part of the European project «PlaceCity, placemaking for sustainable, thriving cities» funded by the JPI Joint Programming Initiative.

The main aim of the project is to advance placemaking as a new approach to creating better cities together and position placemaking as a fundamental measure for urban development and renewal in Europe.

The goals of the project are to:

- Establish and consolidate a multidisciplinary and trans-sectorial European placemaking network as an entity with the capacity to offer support and resources to local and national placemaking initiatives across Europe.
- Collect placemaking tools and methods in a European placemaking toolbox, test these tools in the partner's cities Oslo and Vienna, and make these tools readily available across Europe. This guide is an example of a tool for the European placemaking toolbox, and will be widely distributed.
- Establish sustainable business cases for placemaking in partner cities.

In addition to the international aspects, PlaceCityOslo empowers at-risk youth from H20 High School to create inclusive meeting places and activities for neighbors and fellow students. How? Through placemaking and creative participatory methods, the students identify wishes and needs among students, teachers and neighbors, mapping limitations and challenges, and testing and implementing actions that contribute to creating meeting places and activities for the entire neighborhood.



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