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# The Palmetto

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## *It's Seed Harvest Time!*

by Joe Durando

It's that time of year again, for those of you squirrely folks that didn't realize it-peak seed-gathering time has arrived! From now through October and even into November, the fruit of many of our native plants will be maturing. When collecting, do not be overzealous in your efforts. Always leave a substantial percent of the fruit behind, especially if there are only a few plants of the species you are collecting in the area. Not only are those the seed of the next generation, but some critter may be depending on that fruit as a food source.

Here are some tips to help you get positive results.

Dry fruit should be broken apart. It is not necessary to separate all of the "wheat from the chaff," but the cleaner the seed, the easier to plant. The seed of fleshy fruits should be fairly well cleaned.

Most seeds should be planted immediately to closely mimic their natural cycle. The only seeds that may actually benefit from being stored prior to planting are those of the coontie (*Zamia* spp.), as they often go through a process called "after-ripening." This is accomplished at room temperature, in a paper bag.

Always use commercial potting mixes for starting seeds in flats or containers.

After sowing, keep the seed outside, protected from heavy rain, wind, and critters, but exposed to natural fluctuations in temperatures.



Pine Lily. Photograph from *The Guide to Florida Wildflowers* by Taylor.

Some species germinate immediately, requiring no stratification. Stratification is measured in chilling hours, which is the accumulation of hours a seed in moist conditions is exposed to temperatures between 32°F-45°F. Generally, seeds in north Florida require 300-500 hours.

Many species will not germinate until spring, after chilling. Some species, such as members of the Oleaceae (fringe tree, viburnums), have complex double dormancies

that must be broken. Under natural cycles, this takes two years, although it is possible to force the situation.

Some of the very small-seeded wildflowers, such as columbine and pine lily (*Lilium catesbaei*), need to be exposed to the light to germinate. The rule of thumb is to bury the seed at a depth of one-half the diameter of the seed. I always leave some of the seed exposed when planting very small seed that I am not familiar with.

Seeds with hard, waxy surfaces, such as coral bean (*Erythrina herbacea*) or other members of the Fabaceae, require scarification. Essentially, this means damaging the seed coat to allow water to penetrate and start the germination cycle. This is most easily accomplished using a file or sharp dippers to nick the seed coat.

This should help get things going for you. For more detailed information, I recommend the book, *Growing and Propagating Wildflowers*, by Harry R. Phillips. Or attend chapter meetings, ask questions, and share your knowledge and expertise.

*Joe Durando is past president of the Paynes Prairie Chapter and owner of Possum Hollow Nursery. (Reprinted from the Rhexia newsletter, Paynes Prairie Chapter.)*



Coontie. Photograph from *Florida Wildflowers* by Bell & Taylor



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