

Seed Libraries and Seed Swaps

Seed libraries and seed swaps help communities share seeds and gardening knowledge. These programs are usually volunteer-run and free to the public. In Minnesota, seed libraries are often found in public libraries, garden clubs, and nature centers.

Participants may:

- Take (“borrow”) seeds to plant at home
- Donate seeds to share with others

Many seed libraries and swaps have their own guidelines and best practices for borrowing and donating seed. These programs support local food production and native landscaping.

Minnesota Seed Law

In Minnesota, all seed is regulated under the Minnesota Seed Law (MINN. STAT. 21.80-21.92) and the Federal Seed Act. These laws protect consumers by making sure seed is truthfully labeled.

There is an important exemption for non-commercial seed sharing like seed libraries and seed swaps meant for home, educational, charitable, or other personal uses.

Seed libraries and seed swaps are legal and exempt from most seed labeling requirements provided they do not:

- Distribute seed of a patented, protected, or proprietary variety without permission from the patent or certificate holder
- Misrepresent or advertise seed as certified seed
- Distribute seed that contains [Prohibited Noxious Weed](#) seeds. The list can be found at www.mda.state.mn.us/prohibited-restricted-weed-seeds
- Distribute seed that contains Restricted Noxious Weed seeds above allowable limits
- Distribute seed from plant species designated as noxious weeds that are prohibited from distribution or propagation by the Minnesota Commissioner of Agriculture

Prohibited and Restricted Noxious Weeds can be found on the [Minnesota Noxious Weed List](#) at <http://www.mda.state.mn.us/minnesota-noxious-weed-list>



Recommended Best Practices for Non-commercial Seed Sharing:

While not required, these best practices help protect participants and strengthen seed sharing programs.

- Clearly label the event or space as non-commercial seed sharing
- Label seed packets with helpful information, such as:
 - Plant name (species or common name; include variety if known)
 - Identify hybrids, if applicable
 - Year the seed was harvested
 - A reference for traceability (such as a lot number)
 - Name and city (or address) of the seed library, swap, or organizing group
- Label treated seed according to applicable laws. For more information, visit www.mda.state.mn.us/seed-program
- If collecting large quantities of seed for redistribution, consider testing seed for Prohibited and Restricted Noxious Weed seeds
- Post signs at seed sharing locations stating that:
 - Seeds may not meet germination or varietal purity standards established under state seed law
 - Patented seed or varieties protected under the U.S. Plant Protection Act should not be accepted or distributed without permission from the certificate owner

Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) inspectors may visit seed libraries and swaps during routine checks to ensure requirements are being followed.

For questions or guidance on best practices, please contact the [MDA Seed Regulatory Program](#).

Contact us

Seed Regulatory Program

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Phone: 651-201-6309

Website: www.mda.state.mn.us/seed