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The seed-receivers' apprentice

Sue Bosson

welcomes seed for the HPS Seed Distribution.

A seed receiver's postbag.

Responding to Pauline Cooper's plea for a volunteer to help Joe and Wendy Sime with their huge load as seed-receivers, I soon discovered that normal life as I knew it would be put on hold for two months, and that Joe hadn't been kidding when he'd said not to book any holidays in October.

A very steep learning curve soon followed Joe's tutorial on seed-receiving: an explanation of the

spreadsheets, the huge *Plant Finder* that makes an excellent door stop, then the arrival of my very first packet of seeds some time in August. I was soon emailing Joe with the subject 'Help', but by the time I came to send him *List 26* I think I'd cracked it – or at least Joe was finding fewer mistakes.

So I learnt an awful lot about the seeds of plants that I hadn't known, which meant a lot of time on Google just

to find out what they look like. Joe suggested a useful website¹, link below, which has some useful tips.

It's essential that seeds are accompanied by a list, preferably in A–Z order. If there isn't one, I have to write one. If the packets are also in the same order then that is a bonus. While I'm still on lists (and yes, there is more), please don't write on the back of the list without putting PTO on the front.



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Seeds in cool storage.



© Barbara Dygnas

Shropshire Group at work – here Joe & Wendy Sime receive seed.

¹<http://theseedsite.co.uk/harvesting.html>



Pauline Cooper has a few seed orders to post.

Someone nearly didn't get their request fulfilled that way!

Both parts of a plant name are needed; for example: *Muscari comosum*. There's rarely enough time to research what the seed is if a list provides only a description of the plant, unless it's a very unusual variety. The contents of some of the envelopes I received were a mystery. They came with no name on the enclosed list, or even no list at all. Those seeds are credited to U, U1, U2 and so on. Even if unidentified the seed will go into a general mix.

We do like the botanical names too, please. After an hour or so of checking names they just become words, and I felt really silly when I couldn't find 'Marigold' on the master list! There are also the times when I realise I'm staring at the list with my hand on the mouse wondering what to do next. Ah yes, go and get a coffee, or walk round the garden, anything – but just get away from the computer screen.

Your phone number would be useful in case of queries, and even better an email address, just in case the one we have for you is out of date. And please, if you cannot type the list, keep your handwriting plain and simple – flourishes make it so difficult to read.

Then the packaging. Donors are inventive, so nearly all seeds arrive safe and sound. One donor encased his seed packets in folds of paper to keep them in place in the envelope; it worked beautifully. Origami packets are difficult to undo, so although they keep the seeds safe I keep scissors handy. One consignment arrived in a Silver Spoon icing sugar box, into which the little brown seed packets

fitted perfectly. I received only two packages with insufficient postage, so thanks to the rest of you for checking weight and size at the Post Office.

The type of packaging which really doesn't work is the little self-seal plastic bags because, with static, tiny seeds get stuck inside. Seeds in twists of plastic bags can also end up stuck inside the folds – or scatter all over the floor.

Finally, I found a few foreign bodies: dead snails, beetles and flies, and seeds that really needed more cleaning. When I'm saving seed myself I insert the seedheads by their stalks upside down in a large paper bag or envelope, and let the seeds drop to the bottom as they dry out; that way the seeds are largely free of detritus.

I have made contributing to the Seed Exchange sound like a dreadful chore, but on November 1st, when my job came to an end, I had withdrawal symptoms. Indeed, when latecomer packages appeared, instead of packing them off to Joe as instructed, I couldn't resist a peek inside.

Will I do this again?
Can't wait.

Sue Bosson has been a gardener almost all her life, and now gardens near beautiful Lake Vyrnwy in Wales, 30 miles west of Shrewsbury. She takes off her hat to the members who send in seed, even if from only one species or cultivar, as it widens the range of plants we can all grow. Sue is secretary of her local gardening club and a member of the HPS Hampshire Group.