How to Clean Dry Seeds

How you process, or clean, a seed depends upon the species and how the seeds form on the plant. For dry processed seeds, there are three basic steps before your saved seeds can be put up for storage - threshing, winnowing, and drying. Dry processed seeds like beans, corn, lettuce, brassicas, amaranth, okra, wheat, and herbs. Seed screens used in dry seed processing are also useful to dry wet processed seeds like tomatoes, chiles, melons, watermelons, and squash.

**Threshing** - For most species, the seeds need to be removed from the chaff before storage. Rub or “crush” the seedpods against the mesh of a seed screen or break up with your hands. Large harvests of seeds can be first threshed on a tarp or an old sheet by stomping on them or hitting with a stick. Don’t worry about harming the seeds. If the seeds crack during this process they probably were not good candidates for storage. Stack seed screens with the smallest size on the bottom to catch the loose seeds as they fall downward. Test the size of your seeds with the screen to make sure they will not fall through the screen size you select to use on the bottom. If you are saving a small seed like basil or carrots place a tray underneath the smallest screen to catch the seeds.

**Winnowing** - Seed screens, colanders, and baskets can be used to sift out the chaff from the seeds. Small, dusty chaff will fall through the screen. Placing a larger screen on top will allow the seeds to pass through and the large chaff to collect on top. To remove the chaff that is the same size as the seed use the weight of the seed to your advantage. Seed is heavier than chaff. Use a fan or blow to remove the chaff. It may take some practice but you can work with the wind to remove the chaff by tossing the seeds up from the screen. Remove all broken, cracked, or moldy seeds.

**Drying** Seeds should be dry before they are packaged for storage to prevent molding and to ensure they will keep for a long period of time. Before harvesting your seeds they should be allowed to dry on the plant but if this is not possible you can use the screens to dry the seedpods until the seed and chaff easily separate from one another. For example, if the pod that surrounds the beans is pliable and can be bent the seeds need to be dried for several more days or weeks before threshing and winnowing. Seed screens can also be used to dry wet processed seeds like tomatoes and squash. Line the screen with wax paper or old sheets to prevent the seeds from sticking to the stainless steel mesh. Every day or so shake the drying seeds to help circulate the air. Do not dry seeds in direct sunlight and avoid excess humidity. Screens are also great for drying herbs and flowers.