



A Seed Library for the San Luis Valley

by Marilyn Loser

2015 February 11

Have you ever heard of a seed library? I hadn't until I received several email messages announcing the "Seed to Seed Library Kickoff Event" to be held Friday, February 20, Nielsen Library, Adams State University (ASU), starting at 5 p.m.

"A seed library is a depository of seeds held in trust for the members of that library," according to the Seed Library of Los Angeles (SLOLA) website. "Members come to the library and borrow seed for their garden. They grow the plants in their garden and at the end of the season, they let a few plants 'go to seed.'"

"To check out seeds at Nielsen Library, people will need an Adams State Library card," said Librarian Mary Walsh. The good news is that anyone living in the San Luis Valley can obtain a library card on the day of the event.

The seeds will be kept in packets in an oak card catalog. While I'm very much a member of the digital age, I have fond memories of card catalogs and look forward to thumbing through one looking at seeds!

Walsh said, "The seed library is part of the movement toward sustainability." The majority of seeds will be for vegetables, but there will be some herbs, and a few flowers.

Some people have already donated seeds from local gardens, but many of the seed packets at the kickoff event will be organic seeds from Botanical Interests, Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds, and Seed Savers Exchange.

Seeds are free. "The seeds 'check out' for 365 days," says Walsh. "No commitment to harvest and return them, and no fines. Of course, we encourage depositing back the harvested seeds."

In addition to checking out seeds, Karen Lemke of ASU said some equipment, such as sieves for cleaning seeds, can be checked out.

"The library is both a collection of seeds and a community of gardeners," reports the SLOLA. "Since seed is a living thing, it must be renewed each year somewhere by someone or unique varieties can become extinct. Even growing one seed and returning it to the library is a valuable contribution."

As many of us know, gardening can be a challenge in the SLV. I love the idea of planting a wide range of vegetable seeds and finding out which varieties do well here.

While still in the planning stage, there will be workshops on a variety of subjects including how to harvest seeds. I harvest an assortment of flower seeds, but don't collect and store vegetable seeds. I'm looking forward to learning from our local experts.

In fact, last night we cooked an acorn squash we grew last summer. I saved the seeds and will rinse them off. I've never found this to be an easy task! I still remember making jack o'lanterns as a child and hating scoping out the gooey mush (that's a technical term!) before carving. I don't know if there is an easier way to harvest the seed from my squash and I don't know if it still viable. The SLOLA website said to cure the squash 3-4 additional weeks after harvest to encourage further seed ripening. I don't know if I waited too long!

The schedule for the February 20 event is as follows:

5 – 5:30: Ribbon Cutting Ceremony and Seed Saving Talk

5:30 – 6: Community Seed Exchange

6 – 8: Seeds of Time – documentary film showing and discussion

“Seeds of Time” was produced in 2013 by director Sandy McLeod. It “follows agriculture pioneer Cary Fowler's global journey to save the eroding foundation of our food supply in a new era of climate change,” states the International Movie Database website. I'm especially interested in two features of the film: the world's first global seed vault in Norway, and the plight of Andean potato farmers who are seeing the crippling effects of climate change.

I drove by the seed vault started by Fowler when I was visiting Longyearbyen on the Norwegian island of Spitsbergen, and learned about it in the Svalbard Museum. When in Ecuador, we marveled at the potato crops grown on the steep mountain slopes. I'd like to learn more about these farmers

“A Seed Library for the SLV” is a joint initiative of Nielsen Library, SLV Local Foods Coalition, Valley Educational Gardens Initiative, and the Alamosa Community Greenhouse.

“We don't donate seed, we lend it. The object of a seed lending library is for people to borrow a few seeds, plant them, raise the plants, harvest the veggies and herbs or pick the flowers, and then let their best plants go to seed. The seed is then collected and a portion of the seed is returned to the seed lending library for others to use.” Concord Seed Library, Concord, MA