

Expand Your Gardening Possibilities with Seed Swapping



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It's nearly time to start seedlings, but you've noticed your seed supply is a bit thin. Or perhaps you're bored with the varieties you typically grow and want to try something new. Seed swapping is the perfect way to top up your seed inventory on a budget.

What is seed swapping?

It's exactly what it sounds like! Trading seeds with other gardeners to get rid of excess seed and discover new varieties without spending loads of money. Usually, seed swapping

involves trading saved seeds, but that's not always the case. Don't be shy to ask about the provenance of the seed you're receiving.

Benefits of seed swapping

But it's so easy to buy seeds from seed catalogs! Why would you bother seed swapping at all? Here's why seed swapping is such a worthwhile pursuit:

- **It's free.** Although seeds are some of the cheapest gardening supplies, buying several packets does tend to add up. I've easily spent over \$50 on a single seed order. If your [gardening budget](#) is tight, consider trading seeds instead of perusing through a seed supplier's catalog.
- **It's a way to discover new plant varieties.** Not all plant varieties are readily available. Many seed suppliers stock commonly requested varieties. You won't have trouble finding beefsteak tomato seed anywhere, but if you're searching for a rarer variety, a seed swap may be your best bet. Swapping is the perfect way to find new types otherwise unknown to you or unavailable elsewhere.
- **It's social.** Gardeners don't always get a chance to interact with one another. Gardening—aside from community gardening—is largely a solo activity. Going to organized seed swaps is an ideal opportunity to meet fellow gardeners and swap not just seeds but gardening-related tips and tricks.
- **It produces less waste.** Fewer seeds are wasted if you manage to swap your excess supply successfully. Some seeds have a shorter lifespan than others. If you have an abundance of freshly harvested parsnip seeds, for instance, sow what you need and see if you can trade with someone else since those seeds aren't usually viable for longer than a year.

Where to swap seeds?

Wondering where to go to trade seeds with other gardeners? Check out local seed swapping events. In Canada, Seedy Saturdays are popular weekend events that help gardeners prep for the upcoming gardening season. Many Seedy Saturdays include seed retailer displays, but swapping is also encouraged. Find out more at the [Seeds of Diversity website](#).

Seed Savers also has a [page](#) to facilitate seed swapping.

Community environmental days are another possible seed swapping venue. If there's no organized seed swap planned for your town's next Earth Day event, ask if you can be involved in getting something started.

Your community garden is another place to chat with other gardeners and trade seeds. Inquire with green-thumbed community members, friends, and family. Remember, you don't necessarily need to get something in return. Giving away seed is also perfectly acceptable!

Find out if your local garden club organizes seed swap events in the spring. Or check out online gardening forums to find seed swapping opportunities. I've met several gardeners on Instagram who are happy to trade and share seeds and plant cuttings.

5 Super Compelling Reasons to Save Empty Seed Packets



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Peek into my gardening cabinet, and you'll find a slew of gardening books, some crafting supplies, seed starting tools, my seed organizer, and a bunch of empty seed packets devoid of seed.

Why do I keep the dirty, warped, packets around? If I'm out of seed, why not throw them in the trash? Good question!

I don't dare toss out packets unless they're damaged beyond recognition. There are plenty of smart reasons to keep those

packets close by, but the number one reason is that they contain so much information. A seed packet is an invaluable piece of reference material. Here's what it can tell you:

- **Days to maturity:** This is a crucial piece of information for garden planning. While I could easily Google it, I find it easier to refer to my saved, crumpled packets. I don't mind hauling them out to the garden or getting them dirty during the seed starting process. I'm also more confident in the seed packet info than I am in a Google search. Often, the seed packet estimate is much more accurate than anything I might find online. The best information is straight from the seed source. Another seed seller may sell seeds for a plant with an identical name but there may be small variations in time to maturity.
- **Region-specific info:** Some seed sellers are better equipped to note region-specific information on packets. A seed seller based in California, might not think to include information for cold-region growers, for instance. If you spot region-specific info on a packet, hold it close! I cherish those seed packets that contain info for my specific growing region.
- **Harvesting tips:** Harvesting information is readily available online, but again, it's sometimes not very variety-specific.
- **History:** Historical information won't necessarily help you cultivate a healthy crop, but it's super interesting and hard to find elsewhere, especially if you're purchasing from a specialized seller.
- **Spacing guide:** As a Square Foot Gardener, spacing per square is usually really simple, but some plant varieties have unique spacing requirements that I might not find listed in the SFG book or online. I'll refer to the listed packet spacing for this info.

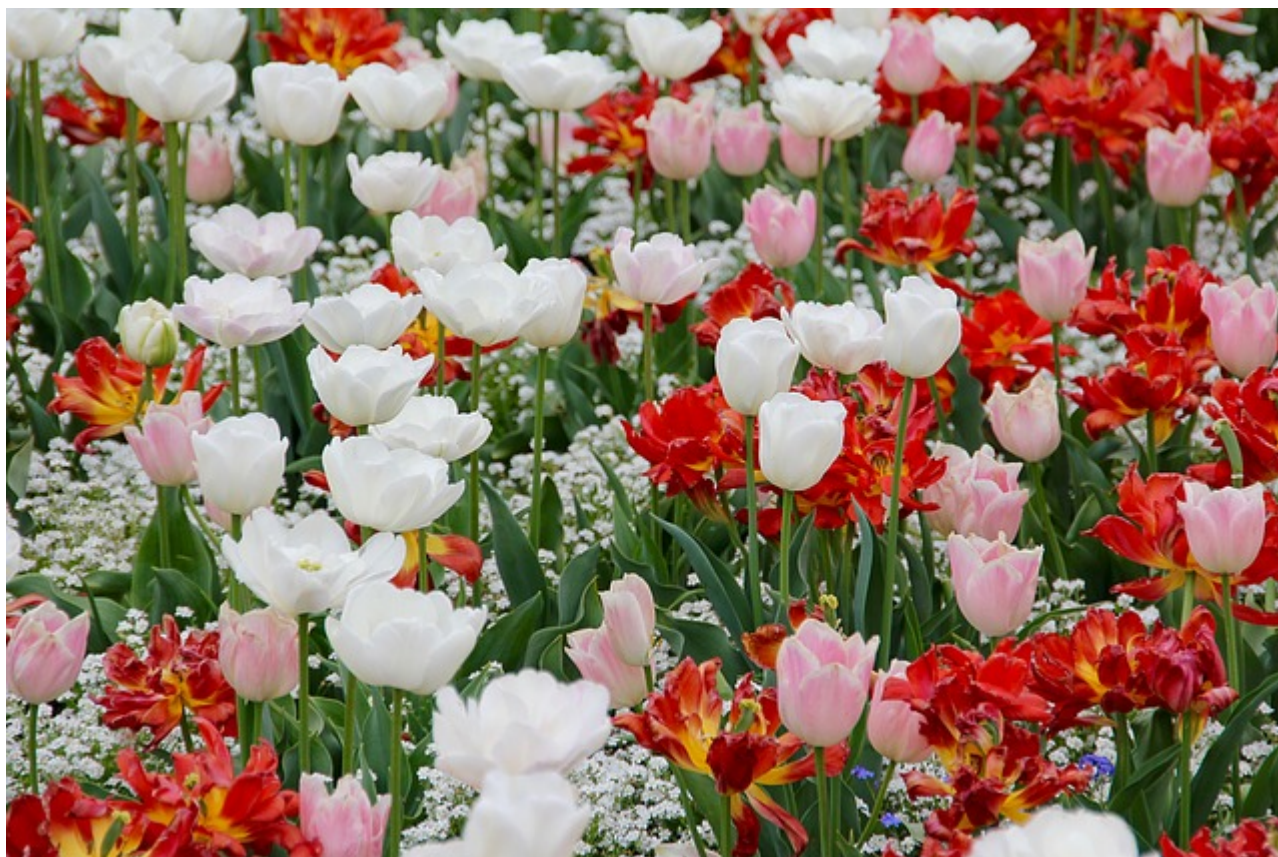
I also like to take notes or stick post-its to my leftover

seed packets with observations and my personal experience growing a certain plant. If the packet says days to maturity is 50, but I found it to be longer, I'll mark that on the packet. It may be my specific growing conditions that create the difference, and it's essential to keep tabs on those small variations for when I'm planning out my planting schedule the following year. The added notes also provide me with info otherwise not on the packet. I find it easier to refer to these notes than to use a journal or other garden diary.

Old packets are also useful if you plan to save seeds. You'll have the original info on hand, and you won't have to worry about forgetting plant particulars.

Do you keep old seed packets? If you don't, I hope that you'll reconsider after reading this!

6 Incredible Flower & Garden Shows to Visit in February



Are you missing your garden and can't believe it's still winter? Are you searching for an out-of-the-box activity to get yourself out of the house? I know. It's so tempting to wait out the winter wrapped in a blanket. Curl up on the couch with a good book, and it'll soon be time to get started on gardening tasks. Even the most introverted among us need a bit of time out, though, don't we?

If you're on the hunt for a fun indoor activity to do by yourself, with friends, or with kids, consider visiting a flower show. These horticultural exhibitions are the perfect place to satisfy cravings for digging in the dirt. Scope out beautiful blooms and enjoy the scent of fresh greenery by visiting one of these flower shows and garden-related exhibitions taking place this February:

[Atlanta Botanical Garden Flower Show: Expressions](#)

Taking place from February 21st until February 23rd, the exposition includes not only fresh flowers but also art, photography, and more all inspired by nature's colorful

blooms.

[B.C. Home + Garden Show](#)

Visit the home and garden show between February 19th and February 23rd and scope out a variety of home and garden related booths.

[39th Annual Connecticut Flower & Garden Show](#)

The popular New England based flower show includes a gorgeous garden display, competitions with hundreds of entries, booths filled with activities and wares, along with a slew of informative seminars led by radio personalities and horticultural experts.

[Northwest Flower & Garden Festival](#)

For those located in Seattle, Washington, the Northwest Flower, and Garden Festival features a variety of workshops, seminars, and plenty of opportunities to shop for garden-related goods. Exhibitors include over 30 nurseries and plant retailers.

[Dallas Blooms](#)

Visit the Dallas Arboretum and Botanical Garden starting February 28th (ends April 12th) to ogle the over 500,000 flowers on display. The on-location gardens also feature plenty of educational material for curious gardeners young and old.

[PBS Wisconsin Garden & Landscape Expo](#)

The expo takes place between February 7th and 9th. Tickets cost just \$10 at the door and are available in two or three-day passes, as well. Notable guests include Joe Lamp'l, Lisa Eldred Steinkopf, and Venice Williams. Check out the website for a schedule of activities, including plenty of fun

gardening-themed stuff for kids (those under 12 get in free!).

A Wealth of Information: 4 Great Reasons to Order & Keep Seed Catalogs



Have you started receiving your seed catalogs yet? Mine have indeed begun arriving in my mailbox! I've set the pile aside during the holidays – I've been too busy cleaning, cooking, and entertaining to peruse them, but I look forward to when I have a chance to flip through the pages of delicious-looking produce.

When the catalogs start to arrive, it's a sign that it's time to start thinking about seed starting. Yes, even under a blanket of snow and frequent ice pellet showers, a gardener should have seed starting on the brain. But what if you already have everything set aside for seed starting – supplies and seeds alike. Do you really need to keep all those seed

catalogs? What's the point?

Growing tips

A lot of seed catalogs don't solely contain listings for seeds. Many provide a wealth of growing information and advice that's useful for beginner and intermediate gardeners. My favorite catalogs include region-specific seed starting and planting charts.

Reference guide

Have you successfully saved seeds throughout the seasons but lost your original seed packets? You may be able to find growing information inside a seed catalog. Many catalogs include helpful growing information for specific varieties of produce. Read the descriptions, and you might discover tips for individual plants that you never knew before – after all, not all seed packets are comprehensive. I've even ordered seeds that arrived in packets that contained zero planting and growing info. Thankfully, I always have a few seed catalogs on hand for easy reference.

Inspiration

There's nothing quite like flipping through a gorgeous full-color seed catalog in the dead of winter. When everything is dead and covered in snow, browsing a large selection of seeds is enough to get your mouth-watering and give you the itch the garden again. It's the perfect way to get yourself psyched for indoor seed starting.

Coupons

Who doesn't love free stuff? I pay nothing for the seed catalogs that arrive in the mail, and I sometimes feel like I'm stealing! I feel even luckier when the catalogs arrive with coupon codes attached. Some companies provide regular customers with discount codes and coupons, which are

infinitely helpful when purchasing supplies in the spring.

You Need to Mulch Trees for the Winter: Here's Why



Are you worried about your tree's ability to withstand harsh winter weather? A bit of mulch might be your ticket to preserving new plant life in your garden.

Typically, mulching of trees is done in the fall, prior to freezing weather, in preparation for winter.

As we head deeper into the winter, there may still be time for folks in some regions to mulch and protect their trees.

It's a little late for those in northern areas, but regardless

of where you live, read on to learn more about winterizing trees with mulch and discover whether it's necessary for your plants.

What is mulch?

Mulch is a protective layer of material placed around the base of a plant or tree. Examples of mulch materials include:

- Leaf mold
- Coco coir
- Wood chips
- Compost
- Straw
- Branches and pine needles

It's also possible to use inorganic mulching materials like faux rubber wood chips, but these don't break down and benefit the soil like organic options.

The most economical mulches are recycled materials like shredded fall leaves. Collect the leaves and reuse them for mulching for an environmentally friendly alternative to storebought mulch.

Purpose of mulch

There are a few benefits to using mulch in your garden and around your yard. Mulch is useful for:

- Conserving moisture
- Suppressing weed growth
- Protecting root systems from cold weather

Over time, organic mulches also break down and help improve soil quality. Unlike inorganic substances, organic mulches also deliver added nutrients to the soil.

Using Mulch to Winterize Trees

A layer of mulch applied in the fall protects tree roots from rapidly changing temperatures by conserving soil warmth. Mulch is especially important if you've recently planted saplings as they're more sensitive to temperature fluctuations than mature trees. Their root systems are also more vulnerable compared to root systems of the well-established plant life on your property. The insulation provided by mulch prevents roots from damage caused by soil expansion and compaction during freeze and thaw cycles in the winter.

When mulching trees for the winter, it's essential to spread the right amount. Adding too much can suffocate a plant's roots. Don't pile it up around the trunk of a tree and avoid thick layers of mulch (2-3 inches should suffice).

Which trees do I need to mulch?

Trees and plant life that are native to your region don't require mulching for winter protection. Don't waste your time mulching the big maple tree in your backyard. It doesn't need it. It's well adapted to the climate and has already established itself.

Other native, hardy plants like certain types of rose bushes shouldn't require winter protection either.

Some trees and bushes may benefit from winter cover, but not mulch.

Focus on mulching recently planted trees and shrubs. Young trees haven't yet built up an established root system and benefit from a layer of cozy, insulating mulch.

5 Fun Hobbies to Keep You Busy This Winter



The ice has arrived. It covers the roads, the driveway, and most of the garden. The leftover plants have turned into icy statues. The wind blows, and they remain immobile. The light coating of snow makes everything look intensely beautiful, though. At this time of year, I get to sit down and enjoy the first full month of no-gardening. There are no more tools to clean or put away. There's nothing more to remove from the earth – everything is frozen, so I couldn't even if I wanted to. There's nothing left to harvest, and I no longer visit the garden beds each morning. They say that absence makes the heart grow fonder, and I think it's true of gardening, as well.

It's easy to slip into a bad attitude at this time of year. The cold and ever-changing weather makes people cranky. I'm

lucky that I happen to enjoy the chilly temperatures, but I understand how darker days and inclement weather take their toll. When your favorite hobby has to be put on hold, what are you supposed to do?

I like to take the extra time as an opportunity to spend time on other hobbies. Winter is the ideal time to sink your teeth into a new hobby or re-discover activities that you tend to neglect the rest of the year while you garden.

Here are a few recommendations:

Cross-stitch

I've yet to physically cross-stitch anything, but I've made it a point to read about it. My goal is to complete one project before I have to get into the nitty-gritty of seed starting – which may be sooner rather than later since the catalogs have already begun arriving in my mailbox!

Reading

I'm an avid reader twelve months out of twelve, but there's nothing quite like snuggling up with a book in the wintertime. Even non-readers might enjoy flipping through the pages of a good book when the temperature dips. If reading fails to keep your attention, try listening to audiobooks. If you really miss gardening and can't stop thinking about your favorite hobby, pick out stories with gardening-related twists, or grab a non-fiction gardening book to learn something new.

Cooking

Crack open the cookbooks on your shelf and learn how to utilize all of the produce you've harvested and preserved. Find recipes that inspire you to use the jars of tomatoes, frozen peas, and dried fruit you collected earlier in the

year.

Snowshoeing

Gardening is a fairly active hobby, especially if you have a large plot of land. Weeding, digging, and moving around structures and dirt takes quite a bit of energy. Don't sit around all winter and do nothing! Keep your body moving. The cold weather doesn't have to bar you from heading outside. One of my favorite winter activities is snowshoeing – you'll find plenty of affordable options at most big box stores or sports shops. It's a great way to discover trail networks nearby and work up a sweat.

Indoor planting

Can't stop thinking about the summer gardening season? If you really miss your plants and can't fathom getting into any other hobby, why not brush up on your indoor gardening skills. Some of the best gardeners I know are lousy when it comes to taking care of indoor plants. If you can't seem to keep a plant alive for more than a month, spend December, January, and February learning how to properly care for potted plant life. Not sure which plant to introduce into your space? Try an air plant!

Do you have any winter hobbies? What activities do you turn to when gardening is not an option? Leave a comment and let me know ☐

Reasons Why Tomato Foliage Curl



At one time, your gorgeous tomato plant was dotted with juicy, bright red fruit and had brilliant healthy green leaves. Now, the plant is looking under the weather, and its leaves are curling up. What's going on? Why is your tomato plant taking a turn for the worse? Why does tomato foliage curl?

Tomatoes are relatively easy to grow. The right conditions produce delicious fruit. Unfortunately, unlike other edible garden plants, tomatoes are susceptible to a variety of pests, diseases, and problems. If something in the soil or environment is off, your tomato plant will send up signals, including curled leaves.

Here are a few reasons your plant might be experiencing leaf

curl and how to troubleshoot:

Disease

Viral infections may cause tomato leaf curl. Pests transmit many plant viruses, so inspect the foliage carefully to check for an infestation. Diseased foliage also often exhibits other symptoms such as yellowing. If the problem is disease-related, you'll typically notice other signs that your plant is unhealthy. Upward curling may be the result of a virus or environmental stress. Tomato mosaic virus, however, typically causes downward curling along (fruit is also affected).

If your tomato plant is infected with a virus, you should dispose of it as soon as possible to prevent infecting neighboring plants. Throw infected plants away, and do not put them in your compost bin.

Environmental Stress

Leaf curl may occur as a result of environmental stress and there are plenty of ways the environment can affect your tomato plant.

- Transplant shock
- Excessive pruning
- Wind damage
- Lack of water
- Too much water
- High temperatures
- Too much fertilizer

In cases where foliage curl is caused by environmental stressors, the situation is easy to rectify. Is drought causing the problem? Then be sure to water consistently or install an irrigation system. If transplant shock is the issue, try extending the hardening off period or waiting to transplant until temperatures have leveled off.

If you don't deal with environmental stress, your plant may fail to produce fruit or leave you with a very meager harvest.

Pests

The presence of pests increases the chance of viral contamination. A large pest presence may also cause leaf curling. A tomato plant infested with aphids may exhibit leaf curl. It's possible to manually remove the bugs (a strong stream of water from your garden hose should do) but keep an eye on your plant. Pests bring disease and there's a chance your plant may need to be removed from your garden.

To prevent pest infestations remove diseased plant material as soon as possible, inspect plants purchased from outside sources before transplanting them into your garden, and cultivate healthy soil (avoid over-fertilizing, rotate crops, etc.)

Weed Killer Damage

Certain types of weed killers may also cause tomato leaf curl. The plant damage that results from herbicide contamination is not reversible, and plants are usually harmed beyond repair. How do you avoid this type of damage? Avoiding herbicide is your best bet. If you decide to use weed killers, be sure to use them carefully. Pay close attention to manufacturer guidelines. In cases where herbicide is the culprit, the leaves are usually heavily deformed. Don't use weed killer? If your plants are located close to city sidewalks or neighboring yards, someone else might be spraying the chemicals that are harming your plants.

A Restful Season



The snow blankets my garden beds, and I peer out longingly at them each morning. The frozen ground is no longer fit to be dug, and most of the straggler plants have wilted away. Each year I have grand plans to build cold frames and harvest through the winter. I tried it once in my previous garden, but the area was too shaded to sustain life in the [winter](#). I intend to go through with the task at some point but, for now, I'm content with having a winter break.

I miss the garden, yet I'm thankful for the respite. I spend my winters pouring time into other hobbies; reading, in particular. A moment away from the plants and weeds helps keep me on my toes in the spring. I imagine that if I gardened twelve months of the year, I'd get sick of it. I enjoy the time off. It allows me to reflect on the season now behind me. What went wrong? What was successful? Is there something I forgot to plant? Is there a crop I should avoid planting next

year? When I feel like it, I create lists and plan for the upcoming gardening season. It's never a chore because I do it when the mood strikes. I have plenty of time to revise and rework my [plans](#), too. The winter is a leisurely planning period – it never feels like work.

This restful period is well earned. As a gardener, I spend the spring, summer, and part of the [fall](#), prepping, planting, nurturing, and harvesting. It's hard work. By the winter, I'm spent. Now that the holidays are around the corner, I'm thankful to have the extra time to prepare to receive guests. It's also a time when the household starts to toss germs back and forth. I've been lucky enough to avoid winter illnesses for years. This time around, though, I've been walloped. I've been bundled up in my blanket, saddled with a fever and a throat that feels as if it's on fire. Sipping my herbal tea, I look out on the quiet, still garden, and feel grateful that we're both able to take advantage of a little rest.

How Much Dirt Does my Raised Bed Garden Need?



One of the benefits of raised bed gardening is the ability to use your own soil mix. It's a serious advantage for those stuck living in places where the soil quality is poor or where there's no soil to speak of (e.g., those who have a concrete yard).

But how do you figure out how much dirt you need for your raised bed? It seems daunting, but it's really a simple math problem.

How much soil do you need?

Here's what you need to calculate how much soil your garden bed requires:

The Dimensions of Your Garden Bed(s): What's the total volume of the bed's interior? Think back to high school math class now. Volume is determined by multiplying width, height, and depth.

Here's a real-world example:

- My beds are 4 feet by 4 feet, with a depth of 3 feet. The volume of the interior is $4 \times 4 \times 3 = 48$ cubic feet.
- If you have more than one bed, you'll need to multiply that total to get your final volume required.
- I have four beds of this size, so I'll need a total of $48 \times 4 = 192$ cubic feet of soil.

Thankfully, most soil is sold by the cubic foot, so it should be reasonably easy to figure out how many bags or truckloads you'll need to be delivered.

Buying from somewhere that uses a different unit of measurement? Use a simple conversion calculator online.

Your Soil Mix

You've figured out how much soil you need to fill your raised beds. Great! Now it's time to decide what type of mix you'll use to fill them.

Some garden centers sell and deliver soil mixes in bulk, but they're not always the right blend for a vegetable garden. Ask what the mix consists of before ordering.

The Square Foot Gardening Foundation recommends equal parts of the following when creating a homemade soil mix (also called *Mel's Mix*) for raised beds:

- Compost (preferably from a variety of sources)
- Peat moss
- Vermiculite

The mix promotes proper airflow and drainage. It's also filled with nutrients and doesn't dry out as quickly as other soil mixes.

Soil Mix on a Budget

Struggling with the high cost of bags of soil, compost, vermiculite, and peat moss? Check with your local garden center to find out about the cost of soil delivery. Deliveries in bulk – dumped in your driveway or on your property and not in bags – are typically cheaper than buying bags separately.

If that still seems too pricey, consider filling your boxes with compost only. It's not an ideal solution, but it's a workable and affordable one.

Because my boxes are quite high, filling them was a huge and expensive challenge. I had to find workarounds to be able to fill them without enough soil.

Bulk Up Your Beds

If you're on a tight budget, consider the use of filler materials to reach the desired soil level in your raised beds.

Use inexpensive things to bulk up your raised beds. Examples include:

- Dead leaves
- Sand
- Layers of cardboard
- Leftover dirt from construction projects (check online marketplaces for free dirt available around town)
- Rocks
- Poor-quality soil (snatch up cheap bags of filler soil at your local hardware store when it goes on sale . Fill up the bottom of your beds with the lower-quality stuff before adding a premium or custom mix on top)

Repel Cockroaches Naturally Using These Ingredients At Home

No one wants to see a cockroach running across the floor of their home. Cockroaches generally prefer to stay put of the light but they'll scuttle around if they have to. In fact, if you think you have a cockroach issue you should leave the room in darkness for 10 minutes and then quickly open the door and turn on the light, you'll see the disappearing.

But, it's more than just an unpleasant feeling. Cockroaches are known to carry several dangerous diseases, including cholera, dysentery, typhoid, [salmonellosis](#), and even the plague. In short, you don't want them in your house.

If you've seen them in your home you need to [click here](#) and get in contact with an expert who can eradicate the issue for you. It's not enough to kill the ones you see, you need to take care of all the ones in the nest. That's why you should get professional help. In fact, the best firms will even give you advice regarding how to help keep the cockroaches away from your home. This is perhaps more important than dealing with the issue, you don't want them returning to bother you.

If you have an issue and aren't sure who to contact then [click here](#).

The good news is that once the infestation is sorted you can repel cockroaches, you simply need to know the right ingredients to use.

Diatomaceous Earth

This white powder is actually a naturally occurring compound which is the fossilized remains of diatoms. These are single-cell algae with hard shells that have died millions of years ago.

The great thing is that you can purchase food-grade diatomaceous earth and it is completely harmless to humans and pets. The powder can be easily mixed with any type of food, such as some cocoa powder. You then put this down so that the roaches can help themselves.

Unfortunately for them, once they consume this powder it starts to destroy their exoskeletons, effectively killing them. You will also have some success targeting the nest in this way as cockroaches will take the bait back to the nest with them, infecting more than one cockroach at a time.

Essential Oils

Peppermint oil is particularly effective when dealing with roaches. However, lavender oil, citronella, and other essential oils are effective when dealing with other pests.

Unfortunately, this doesn't have the same effect as diatomaceous earth. Instead of killing the cockroaches they simply don't like the scent and will stay away from it. You can mix a few drops of essential oil with a little water in a spray bottle and cover the internal perimeter of your home. It will help to keep the roaches away.

Catnip

You may be surprised to learn that roaches don't like catnip. Specifically, they don't like [nepetalactone](#) which is the active ingredient in catnip.

Again, this isn't something that will kill the roaches. But, placed in a variety of strategic positions around the home it will help to ensure they don't enter your home.