

HOW TO ORGANISE A SEED, PLANT OR HARVEST SWAP

SHARE EXPERIENCE,
EXCHANGE KNOWLEDGE,
BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER



WHY ORGANISE A SWAP?

- Find good homes for surplus seeds, plants and harvests.
- Enable neighbours and fellow gardeners to exchange experience and local knowledge.
- Bring people together, grow the local community.
- Spark other nice local initiatives!



Swapping is enjoyed across all generations.

Swapping promotes solidarity, generosity, socializing, self-sufficiency, resiliency and respect for home-grown produce.

HOW TO ORGANISE A COMMUNITY SWAP

The organization of a swap is simple and doesn't take a lot of time. You don't need previous experience with organizing events. The secret is to start small and keep things as simple as possible.

1. Look for helpers

The organization will be faster, easier and more fun if you ask friends or fellow gardeners to help you. Divide duties clearly but flexibly in case of illness etc. Many people are brilliant at designing posters, making seed envelopes, taking photographs.....

2. Research rules & restrictions

By local authorities (but don't go overboard).

3. Find a Venue

Pick a public venue that your participants know and like. If you meet at a square or in a park, other passers-by will notice you as well.



An undercover option is useful in case of rain.

- If there's any outdoor furniture already available at the site, this is a plus. Otherwise, ask participants to bring along a camping table, picnic blanket, or some baskets, crates or boxes.
- Think about parking options so that participants don't have to carry their gear too far. Given that you will be swapping gardening surplus it might be easiest to meet outdoors so that you don't need to worry about leaky pots, soil, plant debris, etc.
- Ideally, there'll be a covered space available nearby in case of rain.
- Local parks, schools, community centres, libraries, retirement homes and community gardens are all good potential venues. In cooler months, gardener-friendly bars and pubs are a nice alternative.
- Check with the owner of the venue if you can have the event there and agree on a slot that works for them (ideally, they'll be excited to host you and offer to help).

You can also organise a plant swap for colleagues within your workplace, university or other community group.

4. Agree on the time

There's no ideal day & time. Talk to fellow gardeners to find out when they could come. Experiment with different days & times.

- It is important to announce the exact time of the beginning and end of your event so that as many people come at the same time and there is a lot to swap. Two hours is a good time frame for a crop swap.

5. Promote the event

Word of mouth and local publicity are the most important. Put up a few posters at the local library, school, farmers market. Internet-savvy gardeners can be easily reached via Facebook, Twitter and gardening forums. The local newspaper and radio will often announce your event, inform them well in advance.

- Give basic guidance on what to bring to the swap (e.g. seeds in winter, seedlings in spring, crops in autumn).



Indoor venues make good choices for the cooler months - to swap recipes, seeds or even cookies.

What can be swapped?

People sometimes think they have nothing to swap but when you start listing things, they soon realize they have a lot. Be flexible -you will be surprised at how many great ideas you would have never thought of yourself that participants come up with. Here are some ideas from previous crop swapping events.

- Seeds, plants and cuttings.
- Home-grown produce (potatoes, tomatoes, apples, ...).
- Home-preserved produce (pickled vegetables, jams, dried vegetables, fruit, teas).
- Home-cooked food (biscuits, cakes).
- Foraged produce (chestnuts, rose hips, mushrooms, herbs).
- Gardening space.
- Gardening help (weeding, picking, preserving).
- Gardening books (cookbooks, books on medicinal plants).
- Packaging for preserving food or growing plants.
- Containers and other gardening equipment.



Not everyone has surplus plants. To make the swap as inclusive as possible, let participants be creative about what they bring.

Avoid swapping meat, dairy products and other perishables (health and safety issues).

ON THE DAY



1. Pack everything in time (to avoid stress).
2. Arrive early. Eager gardeners will always surprise you by being there early.
3. Decorate the venue, make the spot welcoming and appealing so that even passers-by will check it out, learn about your event and join you next time. Keep it simple, use free/home-grown materials.
4. Offer home-brewed tea or cookies (great ice-breakers, better still, ask participants to bring some snacks).
5. Take photos (or even better ask someone else to take photos as you will likely be too busy).
6. Ask participants to leave their contacts for future announcements.
7. Clean up after the event (ask participants to help you).
8. Thank everyone who helped you (more important than you think).



Family friendly activities for kids can work well alongside swaps.



AFTER THE SWAP

Thank anyone you missed - and keep in touch with the participants.

Publish some impressions from the events and photos (be careful about posting pictures of young children etc.)



TOP TIPS FOR NEW SWAP ORGANISERS

- Start small and simple.
- Don't expect everything to be perfect. You're not a professional. (Imperfect events can actually be more fun and help everyone feel more relaxed.)
- Don't do everything alone, you'll be tired, stressed, lonely. Look for a team of co-organizers.
- Let everyone decide how they'd like to help. Don't force responsibilities that people don't want or aren't good at. Don't overwhelm busy people or people with young families.
- Good communication is key. Say thank you a lot.
- If a great idea doesn't work or seems too complicated, drop it – or postpone it for a future occasion.



Each plant swap is and should be unique



Don't be discouraged by a possible low turnout at first. This is perfectly normal - people need to find out about your events and get used to them. The main point of a crop swap is to have a good time with fellow pioneer swappers.

- Avoid very niche venues (e.g. spots popular with a specific subculture, squats) - they might be wonderful but also alienate some gardeners.
- Try to create a friendly, informal and spontaneous atmosphere with as few rules as possible. Let the participants agree on the desired swapping currency.
- Avoid last-minute changes (e.g. in case of bad weather) because people will be confused (everyone hates dragging their pots to the wrong place). If necessary, communicate well.
- Listen to what the community needs/wants/ is open to and don't force successful models from elsewhere on them. Each plant swap is and should be unique.

Why swap, not buy and sell?

Anyone can participate in crop swapping, regardless of social or economic status. This is why we recommend swapping events to be money-free and promote swapping or gifting your glut instead. Use your first events to explain the crop swapping mission: surplus exchange, solidarity and socializing.



Side events can also be run alongside plant swaps

OTHER ACTIVITIES

If you have enough helpers, other activities can be organised to broaden the appeal of the swap, for example:

- Offer a DIY workshop for kids like making pots, lamps, bee hotels or doing chalk graffiti.
- Invite participants to share their favourite seasonal recipes (e.g. courgettes in summer).
- Arrange a tutorial like how to make a worm composting bin or grow from cuttings.

What's ethical swapping?

Swapping is based on mutual trust and respect. Swapping currency is agreed upon by the swappers on an individual basis. An ethical swapper will respect these guidelines:

- Money-free. Gardening surplus is swapped or gifted with no monetary remuneration.
- Fair. The description of goods to swap are objective, true and accurate.
- High-quality: we only swap what we would be happy to receive ourselves.
- Careful. We only swap healthy goods, and take all safety and hygiene precautions.



ABOUT ZELEMENJAVA AND VERTICAL VEG

ZELEMENJAVA

Zelemenjava organises crop swaps in towns across Slovenia. More info on the [Zelemenjava website](#). You can also ask questions in English on the [Zelemenjava Facebook Page](#).

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This guide was written by Darja Fišer, Founder of Zelemenjava and community member of Vertical Veg. The photos were collected through Zelemenjava. This work is licensed under the [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0](#).

