

Travelling Seeds



As summer turns to fall, the flowers in our gardens and fields begin to fade. As they dry and wither, the seeds they have produced are left behind. A viable seed is made up of a tiny plant embryo and some stored food all contained within a protective coat. Given the right conditions, a seed will grow into a new plant. Larger plants, like trees and shrubs also produce seeds, often hidden inside tasty fruits and nuts. Many plants have evolved more elaborate strategies to move their seeds. Spreading seeds reduces competition between seedlings for water, sun and nutrients, and moves them out from under their parents' shadow.

Plants have amazing ways of sending their seeds out into the world

Gravity

Gravity is the simplest way seeds move, they simply fall to the ground under the parent plant.



Wind

Parachutes: Open a milkweed pod and blow! Thistles and dandelions are other good examples of seeds moved by wind.



Helicopters: Throw maple and ash seeds up in the air and watch them twirl. These tree seeds are called samaras.

Water

River and ocean currents can carry seeds and float them far from their parents. A coconut can float across an entire sea.



Ballistics/Explosions

Jewelweed, also called touch-me-not, violets and witch hazel all launch their seeds in the air.



Animals

Caches: Have you ever noticed random tree seedlings popping up in your yard in spring? Squirrels, chipmunks, mice and a variety of birds gather and store seeds like sunflowers, acorns and walnuts for the winter. When they forget where they cached them, the seeds may sprout in spring.



Poop: After the nesting season is over, American Robins and other birds change their diet from worms and insects to berries and fruits like wild grapes. As the berry or fruit passes through the bird's digestive system, the seed coat protects the plant embryo. It eventually leaves the bird surrounded by a nice pile of nutrients. Deer and other wildlife eat fruits and berries with the same effect.



Hitchhikers: Plants invented Velcro long before people did! The seeds of common burdock, sandbur, beggar's ticks and cocklebur are designed to latch on to fur, feathers and clothing. A fun way to find seeds is to put socks over your shoes and walk through a field to see what sticks! *People and boats have brought many Asian and European plant seeds to North America, both unintentionally and on purpose.*



How many kinds of seeds can you find in your yard this fall?

Maple seeds