

Guide to Taking Quality SOS Photos

Photos are essential for every Seeds of Success (SOS) collection. Alongside datasheets and herbarium specimens, photos help verify species identification, check for potential contamination, and support training and marketing efforts.

SOS Photo Requirements

Each collection requires a minimum of three photos:

1. Landscape/Plant Communities (A)

The landscape or plant community photo provides valuable context for future researchers and collectors by documenting the habitat and vegetation associated with the collection site. Additionally, if seeds from other species are discovered during processing or cleaning, the photo may help with identification of that species.

2. Individual Plant (B)

The individual plant in the photo should be representative of the population, serving to verify the species' identification. Additionally, images capturing the species at different phenological stages provide valuable references for future collectors, helping them assess the optimal collection time for that species.

3. Seed (C)

The seed photo is a valuable resource in plant identification verification. Cut test images are also beneficial for training and assessing seed ripeness during collection.

File Format and Naming Convention

- Photos must be provided in .JPG format and labeled according to the designated naming convention. Each image should be assigned a unique letter identifier (A, B, C for the three mandatory photos, followed by D, E, F for any additional images).
 - **USDA Plants Code_Collector Code-Collection Number_Letter**
- Example: Collection crew CA650 makes collection number 101 of *Atriplex parryi*



ATPA3_CA650-101_A



ATPA3_CA650-101_B



ATPA3_CA650-101_C

Taking Quality SOS Photos

Lighting

Light direction and quality are crucial for good photos.

- **Time of Day**

Sunrise and sunset, often referred to as the “golden hour,” provide optimal lighting conditions to capture greater detail. Images taken under intense midday sun can appear overexposed and “washed out,” with plants being indistinguishable like in the example to the right. If photo at midday is unavoidable, position the sun behind you for improved results, but be mindful your shadow has no impact on the image.



- **Cloud Cover**

Cloudy conditions can offer advantageous lighting; however, excessive cloud cover may result in diminished photo clarity like in the example to the right. Returning later to take photos may be necessary, such as to avoid exposure during storms – for both the crew’s physical safety and to prevent seeds from becoming wet and susceptible to mold.



Focus

Blurry images aren't useful, so try to avoid them. If it's too sunny to view your screen clearly, take several photos so you have options later. Once you're in a shaded area or back in your car, look over your pictures; it's wise to check them on-site so you can retake any if needed.

Landscape (A)

Focus your landscape photo on the habitat and key species, keeping the sky under one-third of the frame. Avoid pictures dominated by signs, fences, or roads. Take additional shots for options.

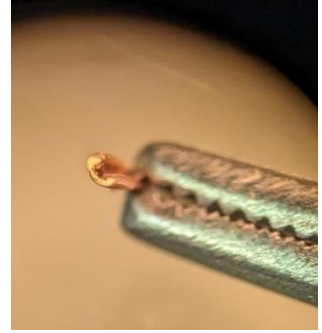
Individual (B)

Photos of individual plants may be captured during any stage of their phenological cycle – budding, flowering, or seed setting – and, where possible, should include multiple images taken at various phases across subsequent observations. It is essential that distinguishing features used for species identification are clearly depicted in the photos. Additionally, using a ruler or other item to provide scale is recommended.



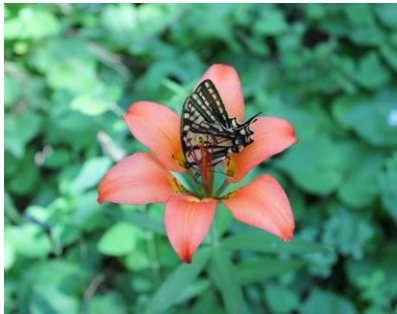
Seed (C)

Seed photos may be captured either onsite or at the office. Items such as rulers, hands, or coins (e.g., a penny) should be used for scale reference. Additionally, cut test images are encouraged for use in training and as resources for future collectors.



Other

We welcome photos of the seed collecting process, especially those clearly showing the people who are involved. Images of pollinators, wildlife, nurseries, events, landscapes, meetings, plants, or seed collections are also encouraged. Naming conventions are optional, but using your crew code and keyword descriptors is preferred.



Submitting SOS Photos

Each crew will submit their collection photos along with all other end-of-season materials. This should be done before seasonal crew members depart, and **no later than December 15th**.

- Email photos to your SOS Agency Coordinator and the SOS National Coordinating Office (BLM_HQ_SeedsOfSuccess@blm.gov) either as a compressed (.zip) folder attachment or a Google Drive link.
- Submit all photos in a single folder; do not use subfolders.
- **DO NOT** include location details in photos, such as writing coordinates on a whiteboard or paper and placing it in the image. Native wild plant populations are public resources that we want to protect, so we avoid sharing locations to prevent untrained over-harvesting. These efforts are outlined further in the SOS Data Confidentiality Agreement.

- Remove georeferenced data from your photos before submitting them to further protect the populations. The following instructions apply specifically to Windows operating systems; others may appear different but should have the same basic steps.
 - Upload all your photos to your computer and save them in one folder.
 - Select all the files then right click and select “Properties.”
 - In the pop-up window, select the “Details” tab and scroll to the bottom where it lists the GPS Latitude and Longitude, among other information.
 - Click the blue “Remove Properties and Personal information” hyperlink at the bottom of the window and a “Remove Properties” pop-up window will appear.
 - At the top of the window, select “Remove the following properties from this file” and then scroll down to the GPS section and select the boxes next to “Latitude” and “Longitude” at a minimum – selecting more is an option but not required.
 - Click the “OK” button. Confirm the GPS coordinates were removed from the “Properties” window by scrolling down to that section again. If it was successful, click the “OK” button in that window to finish.

Additional Resources

To view photos from past collecting seasons, visit the SOS SmugMug website (www.seedsofsuccess.smugmug.com).

For more information, visit the SOS website (www.blm.gov/sos).

If you have any questions, please contact the SOS National Curator, Sarah Hill (sehill@blm.gov).