

Seed Dispersal Methods

WIND



Maple



Tulip Poplar



Dandelion

Seed Dispersal Methods

Wind

Wind dispersed seeds can be winged, like maple, tulip poplar, ash, elm, and some conifer cone seeds or they can be fluffy, lightweight parachutes like milkweed, dandelion, and cattail.

Seed Dispersal Methods

ANIMALS

(forgotten stored food)



Acorn (Oak)



Hickory



Beech

Seed Dispersal Methods

Animals

There are many animals that can disperse seeds they meant to eat. Some seeds, like the hickory nut or acorn, are collected and stored away by an animal like a squirrel or blue jay. These animals usually go back for their stash when needing a snack at a later time. However, some of the stowed away seeds are forgotten and the seed germinates the following spring.

ANIMALS

(seeds in scat)



Holly



Pokeweed



Porcelain Vine

Animals

Animals can also disperse seeds by eating them. Birds are a great example of seed dispersers. They eat berries in one location then fly away and poop out the seeds at another location! The scat even provides nice fertilizer for the seed.

One special case of seed dispersal is the trillium seed. The trillium seed is dispersed by **myrmecochory**, which means the seeds are dispersed by ants. Ants take the seed back to the colony to feed to larva. After the nutritious outer layer is eaten, ants “dispose” the rest of the seed by taking it to their waste area, where the seed can eventually germinate.

ANIMALS

(hitchhikers)



Tickseed Trefoil



Beggar Ticks

Animals

Animals also disperse seeds they never meant to eat. These seeds are called “hitchhikers” because they often hitch a ride without the driver ever knowing it! These types of seeds have some kind of hooks or barbs on the outside that help them attach to an animal’s fur as they scurry by. These same seeds often get stuck to our socks, sweaters, or shoes on a nature walk! Eventually the seed may fall off or get picked off in another location.

EXPULSION

(exploding seeds!)



Witch Hazel



Jewelweed

Expulsion

Some plants have the incredible ability to forcefully spread their seeds! Some native plants, like witch hazel and jewelweed, have “exploding” seed pods. When the time is right, these pods will burst open and the seeds pop out, landing far enough away from the parent plant to have their own space to grow. A wonderful local example of this is witch hazel. In the late fall or early winter, this plant’s exploding seed pods can actually be heard in a quiet forest as they start to crack open and the seeds burst out.

WATER

(floating seeds)



Mangrove



Coconut

Water

Water dispersed seeds can float, allowing them to travel great distances. Floating seeds are more common in coastal areas, for example, mangrove seeds and coconuts can float.