How to Pollinate Your Indoor Fruit and Vegetable Plants

Introduction:

Many people look at me with disbelief when I tell them that I'm growing tomatoes, cucumbers…even peaches and pineapples indoors. One reason for these looks of disbelief is that people wonder how these plants get pollinated indoors. Fortunately, learning how to pollinate your flowering plants so that they will produce fruits and vegetables is easy.

When it comes to pollination, there are really two types of plants:

- Self-pollinating plants, which do not need the assistance of bees, insects or the wind to ultimately produce fruit.
- Cross-pollinating plants, which do need assistance to carry pollen from the male part of one flower (the anther) to the female part of another flower (the stigma).

Self-Pollinating Plants:

Most plants, like tomatoes for instance, are self-pollinating. That means that they don't need pollen transferred from one flower to another in order to produce fruit. But, some very minor efforts will help produce more fruit. Turning a fan on lightly (especially an oscillating fan) in front of your self-pollinating plants can help these flowers, which have both male (anther) and female (stigma) parts pollinate more often. The fan isn't acting to carry pollen from one plant to another, but rather give the flowers a little shake and ensure pollen from the male part of the flower reaches the stigma. In fact, simply giving your plants a little tap or shake now and then can accomplish the same goal. If that's not working, consider upgrading to an electric toothbrush. This is what I often do, and it works quite well.

Examples of self-pollinating plants include:

- Tomatoes
- Legumes (beans and peas)
- Peppers

Cross-Pollinating Plants:

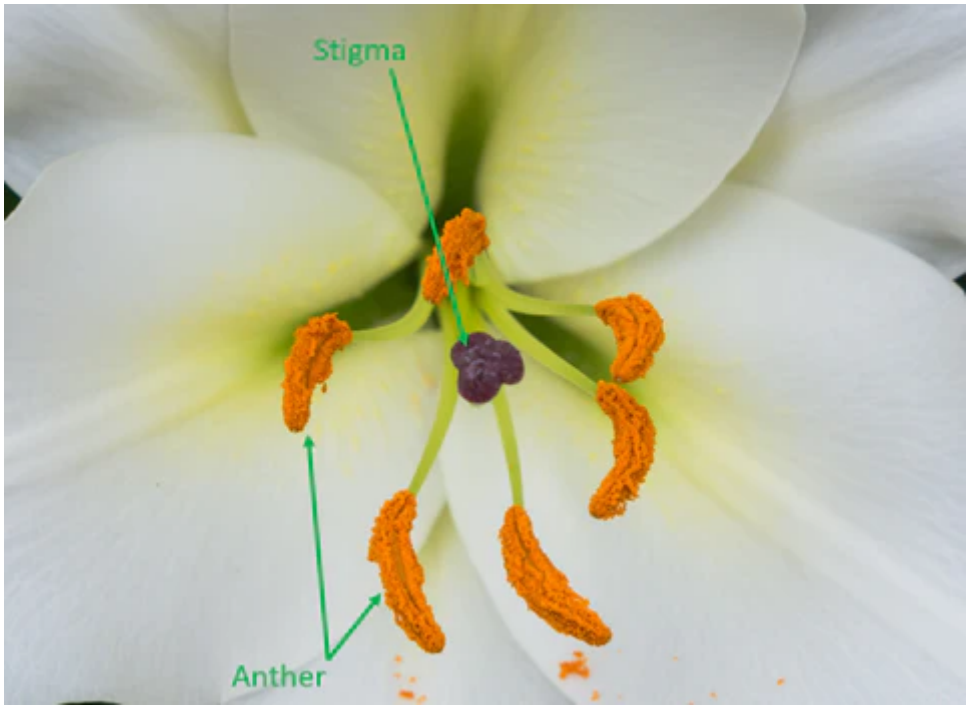
Cross-pollinating plants have both male and female flowers. The male flower has the stamen and anther which produces pollen, and the female flower has the stigma which contains an Ovary. Pollen has to find its way from the male flower to the female flower for fruits and vegetables to be produced. In nature, we have bees to pollinate our cross-pollinating plants. But indoors, where we are hopefully in a bee-free zone, our help is needed. There are a couple of methods for pollinating your cross-pollinating plants.

- Method #1 – use a tool (like perhaps a small brush) to take pollen from the male flower and deposit it on the stigma of a female flower. I discovered that a woman's eyeliner brush that you can pick up at any drugstore tends to work quite well. Many people love to use an electric toothbrush as well.
- Method #2 – remove the male flower from your plant, peel back the flower peddles, and rub the anther containing pollen on the female stigma. Your friends and family will find this slightly less strange if you can do it without making

70's porn music noises (*'boom chicka wow wow'*) while rubbing the flowers' anther and stigma together.

Personally, I prefer using Method #1. The main reason for this is that we're not destroying male flowers in the process, which means you'll have more of them around to pollinate female flowers as they come along.

But there's one more thing that you need to know! How do I tell a male and a female flower apart? Don't worry, it's not too difficult. You just have to find the flower with the stamen and anther vs. the flower with the stigma. For some flowers this can be a little more difficult to determine, so remember…Google is always a few keystrokes away. In other cases, nature make telling the difference very simple.



Cucumbers are one of those flowers that make it extremely easy to tell a male from a female flower. Female flowers actually look like baby cucumbers, but if they're not pollinated, they will simply wither and fall off the plant. In the picture below, you can see two female cucumber flowers next to my eyeliner brush with pollen on the tip.

Examples of cross-pollinating plants include:

- Cucumbers
- Melons
- Eggplant
- Many fruit trees have both an anther and stigma, but still need to be cross pollinated anyway.

So, there you have it. Hopefully this guide on how to pollinate your indoor fruit and vegetable plants was less difficult than the last ‘birds and the bees’ talk you had.

Let’s Grow Together!