

Seeds Everywhere!
by Sarah Wassner Flynn



What might happen if a squirrel buries an acorn?

It's a warm summer morning. You wake up and head to your backyard. Something catches your eye. It's a thick, green bush. Plump, dark berries hang in bunches from the ends. It's a blackberry bush! But you did not plant this bush. Your parents did not either. So how did it end up growing in your backyard?

You can probably thank an animal for this new plant. Some animals **disperse**--or spread--seeds without even realizing it. This happens in different ways, with different animals. New plants grow from these seeds.

Waste Not

One common way for animals to disperse seeds is actually through their waste! Let's say a raccoon finds a blackberry bush in the woods. It eats the fleshy bits of the fruit, but the seeds in the berries are not **digested**. Instead, they pass through the raccoon's digestive system and end up in its waste. Eventually, the animal will **excrete** the seeds. So wherever that raccoon, well, poops, a new plant may grow! Because wild animals roam around throughout the day, the new plant may grow many miles from the parent plant. You might not have raccoons in your area, but everyone has animals roaming around in their backyards. One of them could have played a role in planting that blackberry bush!

Did You Know?



The short-tailed fruit bat can scatter up to **60,000 seeds** each night in its waste.

As the largest **frugivores** (fruit eaters) on the planet, elephants play a major role in spreading seeds. Their waste may contain seeds from more than 70 different tree species! And because elephants walk up to fifteen miles a day, they spread seeds of native plants across long distances.



Some birds drop seeds on the ground as they fly around.

Fly On

Birds spread seeds through their droppings, in the same way that ground-based animals do. But because some birds fly great distances, they can help plants grow in places even farther away than other animals can take them. In fact, some birds are capable of dispersing seeds more than 100 miles away from the parent plant!

Sticky Situation

Seeds sometimes hitch a ride with animals. Some seeds have hooks or spines on them to help them stick. They can cling to the feathers of birds. They stick to the fur or skin of other animals when they brush past a plant. As the animal wanders around, the seeds are dispersed.

Burying It

Some seeds are spread by accident! Squirrels get acorns from an oak tree and carry their collections to the ground. They may eat some acorns, but they bury the rest for later. Squirrels are known to forget where they buried some of their acorns. If they are left in the ground, some of those acorns can grow to become new oak trees.



Burrs are seeds with hooks. Can you see the hooks on this burr?

One To Grow On

Certain animals play an important role in seed dispersal. How they do that varies with the animal. It can be through their waste, by dropping the seeds as they roam, or by burying them in the ground. But the results are usually the same: A plant will eventually grow wherever seeds were spread!

Dispersal of Seeds



By Wind



By Animals



By Water



By Bursting



By Humans

Animals are just one-way seeds are dispersed. They can also move by wind, water, bursting, and humans.