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Advice on Ordering Seeds

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Seed catalogs have been streaming into my mailbox and whetting my appetite for spring. If there was a 12 step meeting for vegetable seeds, I surely would be a candidate---I find the descriptions irresistible and want to plant everything I see. However, I've learned over the years that carefully selecting which seeds to grow in the garden will greatly enhance my success. Here are some thoughts for you to consider.

Length of Growing Season

Probably the most important aspect for you to consider when purchasing seed varieties is the length of your growing season. For example, there are many wonderful heirloom varieties that I would like to grow, but some of them require a very long period of warm weather to mature and I might be better off choosing a different variety. Conversely, there are some cool weather crops, such as peas and lettuce that require a period of relatively moderate temperatures to grow well.

So, when deciding whether or not to purchase a particular vegetable seed, you first must ask yourself this question: *Is my season long enough for this particular vegetable to grow?* Answering this question can be a bit complicated. Finding out which zone [1] you live in can help you determine your period of frost-free weather for planting frost-sensitive vegetables. But there are other temperature related variables that are important as well, such as considering just how hot your daytime temperatures are likely to get, amount of rainfall (which will affect your soil temperature) or if your nights cool off significantly due to your proximity to the ocean, etc.

With time, the answers to these questions will come to you easily. But if you are a beginning gardener, calling the seed supplier and providing details as to your growing conditions will help them answer this question. You can also ask other gardeners, such as neighbors or gardeners on forums such as the Kitchen Gardeners forum [2].

Saving Money

I used to have a habit of buying tons of those little seed packs, which can rack up a sizable bill rather quickly. One trick I've learned is that once I've found a vegetable seed I like is to buy seed packages in larger sizes through the mail order/website suppliers. The purchase price for seeds goes down considerably when you purchase larger quantities. For example, consider the prices on this Carson Bean [3] seed through Territorial. A one ounce package of seed costs $2.20, but if I were to purchase a 1/2 pound package for $6.95, the price of the seeds would go down to 86 cents per pound. This could be especially advantageous if one were to go in on purchases with friends and family on seed purchases.

One caveat: a few seed species, such as corn and onions, do not last long. Their seed is listed to remain viable for only a year. Make sure to check the catalog.

Recommendations from other gardeners

On many gardening websites, such as the Kitchen Gardener's International website, people discuss their success or failure with particular varieties. I find reviews of particular seeds to be quite helpful. The only drawback is that the gardener reviewing the seed could life in an entirely different zone and seeds may behave differently than where you intend to plant them. I have a page [4] on my website, in which I've collected articles and reviews of particular seeds.

Seed Lingo

Certain vegetables have many terms attached to them that are rarely defined and can be confusing to the uninitiated. I've written some helpful articles on my blog (listed below) to help shed light on the issue. Check out the links listed below:

Beans [5]

Carrot terminology [6]

Corn: hybrid sweet corn [7] varieties and differences between grain types [8]

Onion varieties [9]

Potato terminology [10]

Pepper varieties [11]

Tomato terminology [12]

Seed sources

A list of my favorite seed sources and descriptions of what they sell are located here. [13]

Happy gardening!

Amy

www.MySuburbanHomestead.com [14]

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Links:
[1] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hardiness_zone
[2] http://kitchengardeners.org/forum
[3] http://www.territorialseed.com/product/11575/bush_beans
[4] http://www.mysuburbanhomestead.com/about/seed-and-plant-variety-recommendations/i-recommend/
[5] http://www.mysuburbanhomestead.com/bean-seed-lingo/
[6] http://www.mysuburbanhomestead.com/difference-imperator-nantes-danvers-amsterdam-chantenay-carrot-varieties/

[7] http://www.mysuburbanhomestead.com/hybrid-corn-varieties-laymans-terms/
[8] http://www.mysuburbanhomestead.com/difference-flint-flour-dent-parching-corn-varieties/
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[10] http://www.mysuburbanhomestead.com/potato-terminology/
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