

Let's Buy Some Seeds

by Connie Jackson

Erie County Master Gardener



Ahhh...gardening in March...What fun? Maybe one of my favorite months of all.

In my pajamas, on the couch, some hot cinnamon tea, furbuddy Lucy snuggled at my back, the latest Thursday Murder Club Mystery on the end table and...a stack of seed catalogues. Get the picture? What's not to like?

Are you ready to shop?

Wait! Hold the phone and the credit card! Don't be sucked in by all of those beautiful pictures!

Let's start with seeds.

First off, why seeds? Can't we just wait until Mother's Day when the nurseries and big box stores will be loaded with beautiful blooms and tomatoes already on the vine?

Buying from seed gives you at least two advantages: lower costs and greater variety. One entire packet of seeds may cost less than that tomato plant in bloom in May. Two, stores only stock the most common varieties. If you are looking for something special, you'll probably need to plant it from seed and grow it yourself. I'm eyeing that Purple Galaxy tomato. It is featured on the cover of the Baker Creek catalog, but on closer examination, I find that the company "hopes to have seeds for sale in early 2024 in limited amounts." I'll have to check the website for updates for a chance to obtain "one of the world's rarest and most unique seed." What? I'm starting to feel like a Swifty for Seeds!

Take into consideration some other factors when planning your purchases.

The Garden-Based Learning Program at Cornell Extension Office is bringing me back to my senses. The website shouts, "RIGHT PLANT, RIGHT PLACE!" Make sure the plant will grow in your zone and specifically in the conditions that your garden presents. Do you have full sun? part sun? sandy soil? heavy clay soil? Do you monitor your plants daily or will you plant in late May and stop back in September hoping to find beautiful red peppers?

Some other considerations...

Is the seed a hybrid or an heirloom? A hybrid seed results from natural or artificial pollination between genetically distinct parents. The hybrids produced are often bred for specific traits such as disease-resistance, aroma, or increased yield. Hybrid seeds, when saved and replanted, will not necessarily produce the same results as the parent. Thus, you must buy seeds each year.

The heirloom seed has been passed down by gardeners and farmers over generations prized for such traits as appearance and flavor. Heirloom seeds may be saved from year to year and replanted to produce similar results. I have a stash of Brad's Atomic Grape tomato seeds that have replanted for several years. A win, win!

GMO or non-GMO? Genetically Modified Organisms are plants, animals or organisms in which one or more changes have been made to the genome, typically using high-tech genetic engineering in an attempt to alter the characteristics of an organism. The North Carolina Extension Office explains that seed companies put a lot of money and effort into producing their GMO crops and do not sell to the home garden market. A non-GMO claim on a seed packet or advertisement is simply a marketing ploy.

A pelleted seed is coated in an organic clay making it easier to handle, plant and space correctly resulting in less seed waste and less actual planting time.

Think some more... Buying the seed is just the start. Think of germinating, transplanting, care in the ground. How many seeds are in a package? How will you store a surplus? What are the shipping and or handling costs?

Last, pick something fun. I am leaning toward that crazy Purple Galaxy that I may have to get on a waiting list to obtain. I can't take credit for last summer's surprise. My son Jeff grew Luffa sponges - about a foot and a half in length and a couple of inches in diameter. His bumper crop yielded sponges for the shower and the kitchen for everyone. A novelty, but certainly fun, and a real showstopper in the garden. I'm planning on growing them to decorate my Thanksgiving table. I'll stuff the leftovers into the Christmas stockings.

But, for now, back to the couch... looking at beautiful pictures and.... watching the forecast for possible snow.