

When starting seeds, know what you want

Here are some questions to ask yourself before purchasing seeds to start indoors

By **Wendy Hanson Mazet** ■ Master Gardener Coordinator

THE FIRST STEP in having a beautiful vegetable or flower garden is having high-quality, healthy plants. We have all been down this road. We purchase plants, spend hours planting them in our gardens only to find out weeks or months later they were insect or disease infested, or – my all-time favorite – the plant was mislabeled.

The only guaranteed way for us to know that the plants we are adding to our landscapes are free of chemicals, pests and diseases is to grow our own.

By now, your coffee table has begun to overflow with seed catalogs. If you walk through your favorite nursery, it is stocked to the roof with new seeds for 2010. Now you need to decide whether to purchase from a local supplier or to purchase from catalogs or online.

The first step in choosing and purchasing good-quality vegetable or flower seeds is knowing what you truly want. Beginning with good-quality seed is critical. Purchasing seeds from a dependable seed company ensures clean and



viable seeds. Make sure when you purchase seeds from local nurseries or through a catalog that the seeds are labeled for sale in 2010. Seeds labeled for years past will have a lower viability. If you are ordering specialty plant seeds and only receive 10 seeds per packet, you want to know all 10 seeds are fresh and have the

potential to germinate.

Ask yourself these simple questions first when purchasing vegetable seeds and look to see that seed packets provide necessary details:

- What is my growing season? (Typically it's 90-120 days.)

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About this series

This article is the third in a University of Nevada Cooperative Extension series on starting your own vegetable garden. Articles explore such topics as site selection, ordering seeds and preparing your soil. To find the complete series of articles, go to www.unce.unr.edu and click on the "Grow Your Own" logo on the home page.



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■ When is our last killing frost and our first killing frost? In the Truckee Meadows area, our last comes in mid-May and the first in mid-September.

■ Do I want to start seeds indoors or plant seeds directly into the garden? How many weeks prior do I need to start seeds indoors before I transplant them outside?

■ Do I want seeds that are acclimatized to our area? Many times you can find seeds from organic growers at local co-ops and seed exchange events.

■ Are you looking for heirloom, certified organic, non-GMO, hybrids, acclimatized or just good quality seeds? Here's what to look for:

Heirloom seeds –seeds or cultivars that have been around for decades if not centuries. Heirloom seeds keep their growing traits through open pollination and are saved from year to year.

Organic certified seeds – seeds collected from a USDA Certified Organic farm.

Non-GMO (“genetically modified organisms”) – GMO seeds are organisms that have been modified and created through gene splicing using genetic engineering techniques.

Hybrids – a seed that is produced by artificially cross-pollinated plants.

Acclimatized – these are seeds from plants that are grown in similar climates and

high altitude and northern regions

If you are planting tomatoes you'll need to know:

Determinant tomatoes are bush varieties, which will reach a certain plant height and then stop growing.

Indeterminant tomatoes continue to grow throughout the season and produce fruit all along the stems until the first frost

Tomato seeds that are resistant to certain diseases or other organisms will have letters underneath the variety name.

V - Verticillium Wilt

F - Fusarium Wilt (two F's indicate resistance to both types fusarium wilt)

N - Nematodes

A - Alternaria Stem Canker

T - Tobacco Mosaic Virus

St - Stemphylium (gray leaf spot)

SWV - Tomato Spotted Wilt Virus

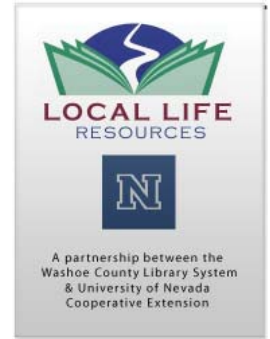
There are many more questions you should ask yourself before you purchase seeds, but this list should provide you a start.

Once you purchase your seeds, keep notes on germination, vigor of the plants and any tendencies toward insects and disease. By keeping notes, you can decide which seed company you prefer and what plants are best suited for you.

About the author



Wendy Hanson is the Master Gardener coordinator for the western area of University of Nevada Cooperative Extension.



Want to learn more?

The following titles are available through the Washoe County Library System. Go online to <http://www.washoecounty.us/library/> and look for this logo, or call your favorite library to reserve a copy for pick-up at a convenient branch.

■ Gardening with Heirloom Seeds: Tried-And-True Flowers, Fruits, and Vegetables for a New Generation. 635 COU 2006

■ Heirloom Vegetable Gardening: a Master Gardener's Guide to Planting, Growing, Seed Saving, and Cultural History . 635.0973 WEA 1997

■ Heirloom: Notes From an Accidental Tomato Farmer. 635.642 STA 2008

■ Restoring American Gardens: an Encyclopedia of Heirloom Ornamental Plants, 1640-1940. 635.9 ADA 2004

■ Melons for the Passionate Grower. 635.61 GOL 2002

■ Edible Heirloom Garden. 635 CRE 1999

■ Heirloom Flowers: Vintage Flowers for Modern Gardens. 635.9