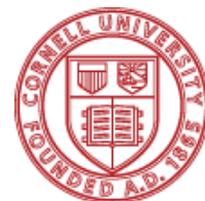




Seed Ordering Tips for 2021

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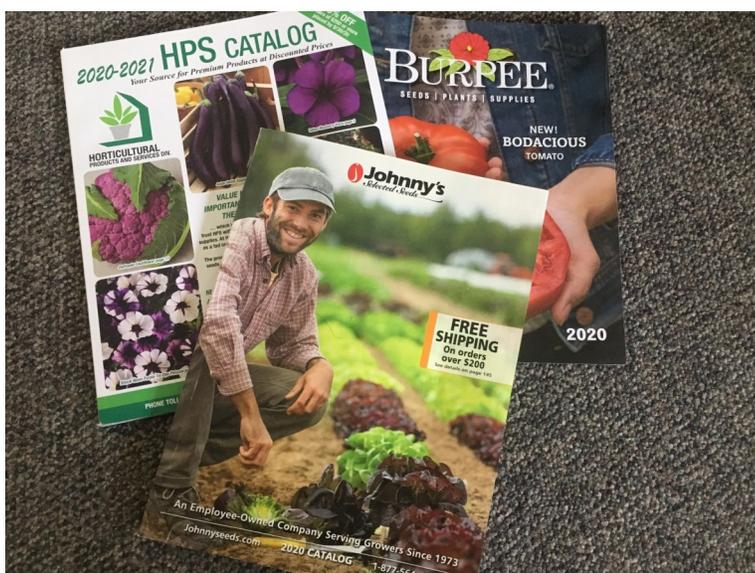


As most of you probably experienced, there were some problems with seed orders last winter and spring due to COVID. Because of the huge demand for vegetable seeds, many seed companies ran out of seeds, ran out of packaging materials, or did not have enough staff to fill orders in a timely manner. Many gardeners were disappointed when varieties were sold out or when orders arrived too late. The upcoming season is likely to be the same, so plan ahead. The key phrase for the 2021 gardening season is “order early!”

Catalogues are beginning to show up now. I suggest that you place your order before the end of the year to avoid any shortages. Also, be prepared to accept substitutions on some popular varieties.

For those that are beginners, below are tips about the different types of seeds and definitions to help you decipher some of the designations in seed catalogues.

1. What are those series of letters that are listed after a variety name? Many catalogs use codes to indicate the disease resistance of varieties. You may see something like this: Sungold Tomato F, TMV. This indicates that this particular variety is resistant to a fungus called fusarium blight (F), and resistant to tobacco mosaic virus (TMV). All catalogues will have a key to the codes. In comparing varieties, all other characteristics being equal, always choose the variety with the most disease resistance. It will save you from extra work, and increase yields.
2. Another connotation is as follows: Ace Bell Pepper (F1). F1 is a common botanical code indicating that the plant is a hybrid. This means two parents were cross bred and their offspring were selected for specific traits. These offspring are more vigorous than the parents, thus the term “hybrid vigor”. You cannot save the seeds from hybrid plants- they don’t come true from seed. The seeds will grow but you will end up with a low-vigor plant that will bear little resemblance to the plant from which it was harvested.
3. And that brings us to open pollinated seeds. The seeds produced by open pollinated plants will remain “true to type” year after year. This means the seed will result in a plant very similar to the parent. If you want to save seeds so you don’t have to buy them, choose open pollinated varieties. Seed catalogues will note these varieties.
4. Heirloom seeds are varieties that have been passed down through generations. All heirlooms are open pollinated, but not all open pollinated varieties are heirlooms. Heirlooms are favored for their superior flavor, but they tend to have little to no disease resistance. Heirloom tomatoes in particular tend to be low-yielding.
5. Speaking of tomatoes, varieties will be listed as “determinate” or “indeterminate”. Determinate varieties are bush-like and grow to a pre-determined size. They produce a concentrated yield over a short period of time. This is helpful if you are doing any type of preserving when you need a quantity to ripen at the same time. Indeterminate varieties grow and produce fruit until the frost kills them. They tend to have



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better flavor because there are simply more leaves to produce sugars. You will get a steady, season-long yield. On the downside they will require trellising and pruning throughout the season.

6. Most seed companies offer both organic and conventional seeds. Organic seeds are harvested from plants that are not treated with chemical pesticides or fertilizers. They tend to be more expensive. Conventional seeds are harvested from plants that may have been treated with chemical pesticides and fertilizers.
7. Days to harvest is designated by a number listed after the variety name, or at the beginning or end of the variety description. For example, “Honeybear Delicata Squash, 85 days” means that from the time you plant the seed, it will take about 85 days to harvest mature fruit. In Northern New York you should select varieties that mature within 110 days due to our shorter growing season.

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