

How to Read Seed Packets

Have you gone through your left-over seed packets from 2019? Are you making your wish list for the 2020 growing season? The seed catalogs keep arriving in my mailbox and this past week I made the serious mistake of visiting one of my favorite garden centers in Columbus, Ohio. The Holiday decorations were half price and the racks of this year's seed packets were staring me straight in the face! I haven't pulled out my seed packets from last year and haven't started my "wish list" for 2020, but the colorful seed packets were beckoning me to take some of them home! I made it out of the garden center with a box of seeds for a Pollinator Garden that contained 1750 seeds that included: *Lacy Phacelia*, *Midnight Garden Mix*, *Pollinator Petal Patch*, *Skyscraper Sunflower* and *Wild Bergamot*.

I found an excellent Fact Sheet from the University of Vermont Extension written by Dr. Leonard Perry that provides gardeners with a wealth of information about reading the back of your seed packet. "The colorful pictures and fanciful names on the seed packets at your garden center and in seed catalogs entice you to buy. But before you get carried away and select more varieties than you have space to plant, take a minute to read the packets and descriptions.

You may be surprised to learn that some of the flower and vegetable varieties for sale are not well suited to your particular location. Some grow best in a certain type of soil or shade conditions, or need to be started indoors well in advance of planting. So what do you look for on the packets and in the seed catalog description?

- **Variety** – Most packets and descriptions list the name of the variety and tell you if it is a hybrid. Hybrids come about from the crossing of other plant parents and are often denoted as F1 or F2.
- **Type** – Flowers also are identified as annuals, biennials, or perennials. Annuals are plants that grow, bloom, and die in one growing season. Biennials bloom the second year after planting and generally die after flowering. Perennials are those plants which come up year after year (if they are hard). For perennials, many descriptions have or refer to a hardiness zone map so you can see if the plants will have a chance in your area.
- **Date** – For best results, buy only seed that is packed for the current year.
- **Germination** – This percentage tells you how many seeds will produce plants under ideal conditions. Some seeds may need exposure to light to germinate. Some perennials may need special seed treatments prior to sowing. Descriptions often tell you how best to start your seeds.
- **Culture** – Most seed packets will contain information on how and when to plant, including the number of days to seed germination, and days to harvest for vegetables. Packets also will note spacing requirements, height and spread at maturity, thinning instructions, growth habit, and special cultural considerations.
- **Number of Seeds** – Unless you are buying bulk seeds by weight, you can be misled by the size and shape of the packaging. Be sure to check the weight, or more often number of seeds, to determine how much to buy. Some descriptions provide information on the length of row the packet will plant.
- **Description** – Some parts of the plant description that may be important to you are whether the seeds are organic. If a vegetable, what are characteristics and shape and size and taste of the fruit? Is this variety resistant to diseases? This is especially important for some vegetables such as tomatoes, melons, and squash. Often specific diseases are listed with letters which can be found in a key or at the bottom of the catalog page.

It bears repeating to have some sort of plan, or at least know how much space or how many pots you have, before buying seeds. It is so easy to be enticed by all the different varieties with colorful photos and glowing descriptions, ending up with several times as many seeds as you have the time or space to plant!"

Be sure to mark you calendars for the garden seminar being hosted by the OSUE Brown County Master Gardeners on **Wednesday, February 19, 2020** at the Mt. Orab Campus of Southern State Community College. **Christine Tailer** will be talking about **Starting Seeds with Float Beds**. All seminars are free and open to the public and start at 7:00 p.m. in Room 208. Remember if the Mt. Orab campus is closed due to bad weather, the seminar is cancelled.

Get those seed packets out from last year and start making your 2020 Wish List!