



Understanding the Impact of Genetically Modified Seeds

Article by Jennifer Rotermund

August and September are a great time to sew vegetable seeds for Fall harvest in the garden. And, starting plants from seed can make a big difference in the bottom line of our garden budgets. A single annual plant at a nursery can range from \$3 to \$20 or more. An average seed packet costs around \$2-\$3 and is filled with 50 to 100 or more seeds. That's 50-100 or more potential plants all tucked into a perfect little paper envelope. But there are so many seed companies to choose from these days, and with terms like organic, non-GMO, heirloom, and open-pollinated being touted as being ideal, where does one begin in the search for good seeds? Honestly, there is a lot being written about and studied on this topic

today. And, there are many good sources out there, but this is how I approach these topics and how I navigate the broad field of seeds and the companies that grow them.

When assessing whether or not a seed-growing company will get my business, my first criterion is that the company grows organic, non-GMO (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genetically_modified_organism) seed or plants. Monsanto (<http://www.monsanto.com/Pages/default.aspx>) and its subsidiaries are the source of most GMO (genetically modified organisms) or GE (genetically engineered) seeds and plants. These companies maintain that their products provide for a more sustainable planet, but there is an increasing body of evidence to the contrary. The Institute for Responsible Technology (<http://www.responsibletechnology.org/>) provides a thorough explanation (<http://www.responsibletechnology.org/10-Reasons-to-Avoid-GMOs>). You can even take it a step further and look for companies that offer "open-pollinated" (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open-pollinated>) and "heirloom" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heirloom_plant) seeds. Monsanto is steadily buying up the legal rights to many of our favorite garden-variety seeds (like Burpee's Big Boy tomato) and selling them through their seed-selling company, Seminis ([seminis.com](http://www.seminis.com)). These seeds are either modified to be sterile (i.e. they won't produce viable seeds you can save) or if you do save the seeds, Monsanto can slap you with a lawsuit - and they are actively doing this. Buying open-pollinated, heirloom seeds will ensure not only high quality, healthy seed, but seeds you have the freedom to save and grow year after year.

My other criterion involves what I call the "small-local factor." I don't like the idea that the seeds I buy were grown on a industrial mega-farm, mass-processed through a giant seed packaging factory, and then sold in a big box store that pays our friends and neighbors who work there something barely over minimum wage. Our gardens are intimate spaces and our food directly correlates to our health - neither of which can be qualitatively sustained by a big

corporation. And, in a world increasingly driven by gadgets supplying us with instant access to the world, I find great comfort in being on a first name basis with the person who grows my food - or at least knowing the name of their family farm. I can see the passion in their eyes when they tell me about the product they grew, and that's where I wish to put my money. Whenever possible, I seek out a small seed-producing farm or seed-selling business. Likewise, when the seeds or plants you buy are grown in your region, they're much more likely to succeed in your garden. Like any local, they understand the culture and know what to expect!

The following are a few of my favorite companies -

From the Northwest:

Uprising Seeds: <http://www.uprisingorganics.com/>

Irish Eyes: <http://irisheyesgardenseeds.com/>

Seattle Seed Company: <http://www.seattleseed.com/>

Oatsplanter Farm: <http://oatsplanterfarm.blogspot.com/>

Horizon Herbs: <http://www.horizonherbs.com/>

Victory Seeds: <http://www.victoryseeds.com/>

Some Great Non-Local Companies and Organizations to know about are:

Seed Savers Exchange: <http://www.seedsavers.org/>

Fedco Seed Co-op: <http://www.fedcoseeds.com/>

Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds: <http://rareseeds.com/>

High Mowing: <http://www.highmowingseeds.com/>

Happy Seed Buying and Food Growing!

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