

Seed Selection for Garden Success



Although gardening season is still months away, now is the perfect time to start planning. For gardeners who start plants from seed, there are many options available, but which ones will result in healthy plants?

Seed catalogs and seed packets sold in local garden centers offer options to meet many gardening goals, including flowers, vegetables, organic varieties, heirlooms, and regionally specific seed. These commercially available seeds must meet Minnesota's seed labeling laws, which require accurate germination rates and prohibit the presence of invasive weed seeds. Many seed companies also test their seeds to verify that plant pathogens, such as fungi, viruses, or bacteria, are not present in the seed and waiting to cause future problems. Purchasing seed from a reputable supplier is a reliable way to reduce the risk of introducing problems along with your seed.

Saving seed from your own garden or acquiring seed through a local seed swap is a popular alternative to purchasing seed. Remember to only save seed from healthy plants. Some plant pathogens can move from an infected mother plant into the seed. Seeds produced by sick plants may appear healthy but once planted, plant pathogens can become active and cause disease in new seedlings. It is also important to only swap seeds locally. Different plant diseases occur in other states and countries that are not currently present in Minnesota. If introduced on infected seeds, these invasive plant pathogens could cause significant damage to Minnesota's gardens, farms, and natural ecosystems.

Never use produce from the grocery store as a source of seed. Much of produce available in Minnesota in late winter and early spring is grown outside of the United States. Produce is considered a low-risk pathway for invasive plant diseases because cooking kills plant pathogens. However, seeds taken from grocery store produce, such as tomatoes and peppers, may carry invasive viruses and bacteria. These pathogens can grow and spread if the seeds are planted. There has been one confirmed case of Tomato Brown Rugose Fruit Virus (ToBRFV), an invasive plant virus not established in Minnesota, being introduced by a grower who planted seed collected from grocery store tomatoes.