KPOV – *The Point*

Gardening: Get Good At It

Seed Packets – A Miniature Reference Guide

March 16, 2021

STOP - Before you buy those seeds at the garden center or from the many catalogs you received, have you read the entire description on the packet? Are you selecting them based on the colorful pictures and fanciful names? Many varieties may not do as well in our Central Oregon climate.

To make an informed decision, let’s think about data available to you on the seed packet and use it as a miniature reference guide.

First, make certain you are buying only the seed packed for the current year.

Secondly, and probably most important for our climate is the number of days to maturity. To compensate for the temperature swing between warm days and cool nights add 14 days to the listed time. A tomato listed as a 65-day maturity, with the additional 14 days becomes a 79-day tomato.

Variety: Most seed packets 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.  This often gives a trait such as bigger flowers or more vigor.  It is important to know if you want such traits, or if you want to collect seeds.  Flowers are also 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 hardy).  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.

Next, the packet will list the germination rate which is how many seeds will produce plants under ideal conditions.  Some seeds may need exposure to light to germinate and some may need to be soaked in water overnight prior to sowing. It will also tell you if direct outdoor planting is best of if you should start them indoors which leads me to culture.

Most seed packets will contain information on how and when to plant, including the number of days to germination and days to harvest. Packets will note spacing requirements, thinning instructions if planted in the ground, growth habit, special cultural needs, and height and spread at maturity.

It’s also important to know the number of seeds in the packet when ordering seed and planning a garden. Unless you are buying bulk seeds by weight, you can be misled by the size and shape of the packaging.  Large seed companies usually include this information on the package as either the number of seeds or the weight of seed. Keep in mind that since the seed of different plant types and cultivars (varieties) often differs in size and weight, the number of seeds per package will vary with each cultivar. If you don’t see this fact on the packet you can sometimes find it on the company website or in the catalog under ordering information.

Research is so important to help you have a successful garden. If you have a smartphone and a free app for scanning, you can use the QR Code on the packet to go to the company’s web site for more information about the product.

Finally, I want to bring your attention to the seed description. The description will include characteristics such as shape, size, taste, if it’s a vegetable, or varieties that are resistant to diseases? Description might also suggest if a variety of vegetable is good for preserving or slow to bolt.

The important thing is to look for traits that are most important to you, such as size of fruit, color of fruit or flowers, height of plant, the need or not for staking, yield, or time of flowering or ripening.  While flavor is often the most desired trait of vegetables, color is often the most desired trait with flowers. Flowers that are organic or new or trialed and tested nationally may be found at the All-American Selection website.

For answers to all your gardening questions, please visit our website: gocomga.com and click on the KPOV tab on the orange bar. This has been Gardening: Get Good At It on KPOV’s The Point.

Resources:

<https://extension.oregonstate.edu/news/use-seed-packets-miniature-reference-guides>

<https://extension.psu.edu/information-on-seed-packets>

<http://extention.unl.edu/publications> - Understanding the seed packet

<https://boyle.ca.uky.edu/files/spring_2017_newsletter_0.pdf>