

Planning the Vegetable Garden

Buying Seeds



Most of us are familiar with Burpee and Ferry Morse seeds, perhaps seeing them in stores and nurseries, in their print catalog or through online advertisements. But there are many other seed companies and almost all of them have an online presence. If you restrict your seed buying to what is on the seed rack in your local store, the selection can be quite limited, especially this last year when everyone decided to garden and the local supplies were depleted. On the other hand, when I peruse the online websites of the seed companies, I am always amazed at the selection available. It is truly eye candy for the gardener!

Go through your old seed packets

Obviously this is the time to go through your seed packets from last year (or the years before...) and take an inventory of the vegetable seeds that you already have. Many seed packets come with many more seeds than one will use in one season (for example tomatoes, peppers, squash, cucumbers, swiss chard, kale, collards and beets). Fortunately these seeds, along with peas and beans, will remain viable for several years. On the other hand, spinach and alliums (onions, leeks and chives) are short-lived and old seeds might not sprout so it may be wise to use them up (or share them) each year. [High Mowing Seeds](#) has a seed viability chart to help. Sometimes, even after making the inventory, one is so tempted by the seed company websites that one just has to buy yet another variety of tomato or pepper or squash. Who can resist some of the names, photos, and descriptions?

Seed Companies

There are many old seed companies that have been in business for decades:

- [Burpee](#)
- [Park](#)
- [Gurney's](#)
- [Ferry Morse](#)

And there are many new ones as well. These are a few that I know about and have bought seeds from.

- [Baker Creek Heirloom Seed Company](#) (Rare seeds, open-pollinated non-hybrid, a huge assortment from all over the world)
- [Botanical Interests](#)
- [High Mowing Organic Seeds](#) -- sometimes for sale at the East End Food CoOp
- [Hudson Valley Seed Company](#) (with beautifully designed Art Pack seed packets) -- sometimes for sale at the East End Food CoOp. Specializing in open-pollinated and hard to find seeds.
- [John Scheepers Kitchen Garden Seeds](#)
- [Johnny's Selected Seeds](#)
- [Kitazawa Seed Company](#) (a California company specializing in Asian vegetables)
- [Renee's Garden](#)
- [Seed Savers Exchange](#) (dedicated to saving heirloom varieties)
- [Seeds from Italy](#) (US distributor for Franchi Seeds - 450 heirloom varieties)
- [Tomato Growers Supply Company](#) (specializing in tomatoes and peppers)

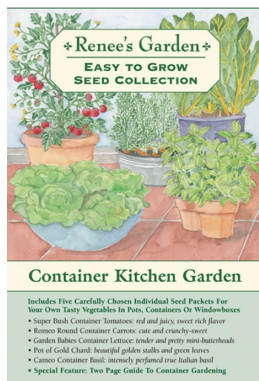
One disadvantage to buying directly from the seed company is that you have to pay shipping so it doesn't make sense to buy just one seed packet. Some of the seed companies are offering free shipping if you spend a certain amount. Kitazawa charges \$5 shipping to Oakmont for 1-18 seed packets, so it makes sense to buy several. Seeds from Italy has a flat rate of \$4 for shipping and Burpee has a flat \$2.99 shipping rate on all seed packet orders. You need to be aware that there usually is a shipping charge.

Seed Collections



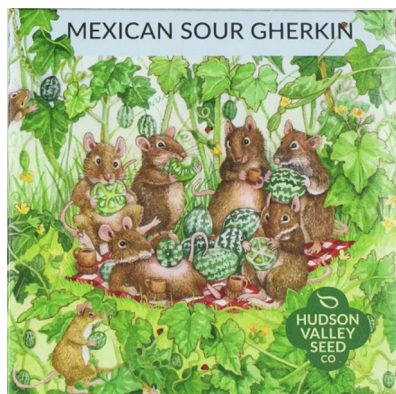
Most of these seed companies allow you to search for certain kinds of seeds such as Organic and Non-GMO, Heirlooms (open-pollinated non-hybrids), AAS Winners (All America Selections that have done well in all parts of the country), vegetables for containers, and Asian Greens. If you don't want a lot of seeds of one variety, most seed companies offer variety packs, especially of the "baby greens" that allow you to grow your own salad mix of

multiple lettuces, beet greens, mustards, etc. Hudson Valley Seed Co. offers an [All Stars Kale](#), [Bumble Bee Mix Cherry Tomato](#), a [Brilliant Beet Blend](#), [Kaleidoscope Carrots](#), [Radiant Radish Mix](#), and a [TriColor Bean Blend](#). Renee's Garden offers [Five Color Rainbow Beets](#), [Delicious Duo Salad Scallions](#), [Italian Trio Eggplants](#), and [Southwestern Chile Trio](#); and the last two collections are color coded so you know which seed is which.



If you don't have a large yard, there are more and more vegetables being developed to grow in containers. Burpee has a very large collection of [Container Favorite Vegetables](#) and most other sites will allow you to search for those vegetables that do well in containers. If you want to get children or grandchildren interested in gardening, John Scheepers Kitchen Garden Seeds offers [The Ladybug Fast & Easy Vegetable Garden](#) that can be direct sown and ready within 6 weeks, and [The Itty Bitty Veggie Garden](#) with small varieties of carrots, cukes, tomatoes, etc.

Try Something Different



Often the names themselves are enough to sell you on a vegetable. Who couldn't resist a [Painted Serpent Cucumber](#) from Hudson Valley Seed Co.? They also offer [Stinging Nettle](#) (for some French Nettle Soup) and [Shishito Peppers](#). Kitazawa Seed Company offers a really extensive variety of Asian [cucumbers](#), [leafy vegetables](#), and [eggplants](#). Gurney's offers [six varieties of rhubarb plants!](#) Renee's Garden has [13 varieties of basil!](#) And if you are Italian, you could also try their [Italian Oregano](#), [Italian Sage](#), [Rapini](#), [Violetta Lunga Italian eggplant](#), [bulbing fennel](#) and [Lacinato Kale](#).

Direct Sow or Start Indoors?

A disadvantage to buying certain seeds, such as tomatoes, peppers and eggplants, is that you have to start them indoors 6-10 weeks before setting the seedlings out in the garden after the frost-free date for your area. Most seed packets will tell you how far in advance you should start the seeds indoors. Oakmont is considered zone 6 and you can find your zone at [Burpee's Growing Calendar](#) where you can see the dates for when you should sow indoors and transplant, or sow outdoors for each category of vegetable. The majority of vegetables you can direct sow

outdoors but you do need to be aware of the appropriate time for your zone. Burpee even allows you to print out the calendar for your vegetables.

When the World is Back to Normal...

Each February for the past 8 years, the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, in conjunction with Grow Pittsburgh and the Phipps Conservatory, has held an Annual Seed and Plant Swap. Many of the seed packets that they give away for free are last year's packets from seed companies. This year will probably be an exception and they won't hold it but it is a great place to pick up a wide variety of seeds at an unbeatable price.