

December 21, 2016



The Seedy Side of Gardening
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December is a busy time of year for people due to holiday events, but for hard-core gardeners, it is also the time of year when they eagerly await the seed catalogs arriving almost daily in the mail. For these folks, choosing and ordering seeds is a fairly straightforward activity, but what about those who are not quite as experienced in knowing what to choose? Here are a few pointers:

First, order early. You will avoid the disappointment of requesting a sold out item and you may even be rewarded with a free bonus seed packet if you get your order in early. If you are unsure what to order, it is a good idea to ask other gardeners to share information on their favorite varieties and success or failure stories. Pictures in seed catalogs can be sometimes deceiving and a variety of plant that you "just have to have" may not be suited to El Dorado County. This is where the sharing of information between gardeners comes in handy.

There are some terms in seed catalogs that can be confusing. **Hybrid** seeds are often denoted as F1 and are derived from two or more different plants with traits that improve on the best characteristics of the parent plants. Saving seeds from hybrids will not guarantee the same plant in future plantings. **Open Pollinated (OP)** seeds are those that will produce plants genetically identical to the parent plant. These plants were pollinated by natural means (bees or the wind) and the seeds may be saved for future plantings because they will breed "true." **Heirloom** seeds are open pollinated varieties that have been passed down through the generations for 50 years or more, and may have distinctive colors, shapes and flavor. However, heirloom plants may not always have the benefit of resistance to diseases as their hybrid counterparts do. **Organic** seeds (**O**) have been harvested from plants grown organically without the use of synthetic fertilizers or pesticides. **Treated** seeds are seeds that have been coated with a fungicide or insecticide to

December 21, 2016

increase a seed's ability to sprout without rotting or being attacked by insects in the soil. Many seed companies add color to the treatment to set them apart from untreated seeds. An example of this would be yellow corn seeds appearing pink.

Since tomatoes are usually at the top of the list for seed ordering, the descriptions of various types would include the terms **determinate** or **indeterminate**. Determinate tomato varieties have fruits that ripen at the same time and have a bush-like habit. They usually do not need to be supported by staking or caging. **Indeterminate** tomato plants on the other hand ripen throughout the growing season and continue to grow right up until the first frost. These do need staking, caging or trellising for support.

It is a good idea to research seed companies offering smaller-sized packets of seed. For example, some tomato packets contain 30 or more seeds and if all germinate, you will have 30 tomato plants to plant and care for. Don't let the beautiful pictures in seed catalogs persuade you to order one of everything.

There are no Master Gardener public education classes this weekend. Enjoy your holidays!

UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512. Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at http://ucanr.edu/master_gardener_e-news. You can also find us on Facebook.