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Seeds - Smells Like Spring

Dennis Hinkamp
Utah State University

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GARDEN NOTES

SEEDS - SMELLS LIKE SPRING

By Dennis Hinkamp

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Winter-15

There's nothing quite like the smell of freshly printed seed catalogs to get you out of your winter funk. Does it make any difference if you buy locally or from a catalogue located in some foreign country—like New Jersey?

Columbus brought the first seed packets to the new world on his second voyage in 1493, claims Jerry Goodspeed, Utah State University Extension horticulturist. "This might have been the first example of sending away for seeds. It's likely that a few natives even got the wrong seeds, or received the message, 'that item is back ordered and will be shipped later.'"

Most of our vegetables and flowers are not native to America, and were literally shipped to our country, Goodspeed explains. Both seeds and small transplants have been introduced so we can grow what we like. Early colonists brought tobacco from Trinidad and planted it everywhere. Soon, other cash crops such as rice, cotton and indigo, were introduced and grown throughout the colonies. The rise in demand for ornamental seeds along with small quantities for home gardens started in the late 1700s and early 1800s.

Today, seed-producing plants are grown by companies that specialize in just producing seeds, he says. The seed companies have contracts with growers who raise many acres for seed production. This company then brokers the seeds to different packaging or wholesale companies throughout the United States and world.

"Sweet corn is a good example of how this works," Goodspeed says. "A large percent of the sweet corn grown for seed is produced in southwest Idaho. These companies grow the seed and then sell it to packaging companies throughout the nation. This means that regardless of where you buy the package, the seeds were grown in Idaho."

A lot of the seeds we buy are actually grown in tropical climates throughout the world. Production is faster and less prone to plant diseases in warmer climates. Most growers have fields in more than one place throughout the world to prevent a natural disaster from wiping out their entire crop.

"Knowing that seeds bought from New Jersey or Ogden probably originated from the same field may help in determining where to buy seeds," Goodspeed says. "Buying locally is usually more convenient and you know what you are getting. Also, most of our local businesses

sell seed varieties that have proven to do well in our area.

“When I can’t find a certain variety in the local market, I order from catalogues that have a good reputation and that I have done business with in the past. I select companies that specialize in seeds and do not offer a lot of other products or gimmicks such as free seedlings or million dollar sweepstakes.”

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