**SEED LIBRARY: SELECTION & GROWING TIP SHEET**

MOST important: Choose seeds that you enjoy eating. And have fun!

Refer to maturity dates and choose seeds that you can grow within the growing season available to you. Our **growing season for direct seeding** (seeding in the garden plot) starts May 22- Sept 29. That is about 125 days. The days to maturity is on the seed packet or can be looked up on line. Some seeds benefit from being started indoors (because they require more time to reach maturity). Generally, they are started indoors 6 weeks before the last average frost-free date, May 22.

**Tomatoes** need a long growing season, so most people start them indoors 6 weeks before the average frost free date of May 22 and then transplant them outdoors. **Peppers** and **corn** like heat and should be planted around June 1 when the soil has really warmed up.

Many **greens, peas,** and **lettuces** don’t like heat and should be planted early, as soon as the soil can be worked, usually in March. As the soil and outside temperatures heat up, these fragile greens will go to seed and get bitter. Better to delay planting util late August or early September for a fall veggie garden as the temps begin to cool off again.

If you are new to gardening or seed saving, choose seeds with a green dot—that means it’s easy to save those seeds because they self-pollinate and won’t need isolation to avoid crosses from other varieties in the same species. **Seed saving is important!** During this pandemic, many commercial seed sources and therefore gardeners and farmers have run out of seeds. Without seeds, we cannot survive.

Our **soils** are poor in this region. It’s really dirt, not soil. The best way to create soil that will support healthy, nutritious vegetables is to create a **raised bed** above the grade using untreated 2x6 boards, bricks, cement blocks, or rocks to hold the soil in place to at least 6” above ground level. Cover the bottom of the bed with hardware cloth to prevent gophers, etc., from tunneling in. Fill the raise bed with a mix of garden soil (which can be purchased in bulk or bags from soil yards like Reunity Resources or from nurseries or big box stores), compost (same sources), and amendments like rock dust, green soil, humus, and worm castings. These contribute to healthy soil that absorbs and holds moisture and contains the microbes that exchange nutrients with the plant roots. Most veggies are heavy feeders, meaning that in addition they need regular feedings with an organic fertilizer that delivers a balanced dose of nitrogen, potassium, and phosphorus (NPK) —the keys to plant growth. Your raised bed should be no wider than 4 feet so you can reach the middle without stepping on the soil. Compaction should be avoided. Many veggies can be **grown in containers**, especially “patio” tomatoes.

Water, light, and heat are **what seeds need to germinate**. Plant seeds according to directions or 2X the length of the widest part of the seed. Some seeds need pre-treatment like soaking or scarifying or nicking. Some just go straight into the ground. Lettuce needs light to germinate so place the seeds on top of the soil and then cover lightly with perlite of garden soil so that they still are exposed to light. It is vital that while you are trying to get seeds to germinate that you keep the soil lightly moist by misting or lightly watering in a way that will not disturb the seeds a couple times a day. Once the seeds emerge you can water less often but be careful not to let the soil of your fragile seedlings to dry out. However if you over water it can cause disease called damping off.

If you are **starting your seeds indoors,** use a soilless seed starting mixture and be aware of the timing. You need to count back to the ideal date for starting indoors based, usually 6 weeks before the ideal date to transplant the starts outdoors. Be aware that chiles and tomatoes need warmth and artificial light to germinate and then they continue to need light to grow. Once they set their second set of leaves, called their true leaves, they will need to be up-potted and exposed to enough light that they don’t get leggy. And, of course continue to water but don’t waterlog them. Soil should be moist like a wrung-out sponge. Then when we are wll past the last average frost fee ate, plant the seedling out into the garden.

**Light**. Almost all veggies need at least 6 hours of full sun, so site your vegetable garden accordingly. Most will do best if they get morning sun but are protected from the harsh afternoon sun. Shade cloth can help with this.

**Water**. Drip irrigation is a great way to keep your garden watered efficiently. A drip system can be on a timer and placed so that the emitters deliver water just where it’s needed.

**Weeds** can be controlled by adding a mulch. Many people use straw mulch around their vegetables to suppress weeds and to keep the moisture in the surface of the soil from evaporating. Of course you can pull the weeds or lightly cultivate with a hoe.

**Bugs** can be a problem. They are specific to each plant and the solutions are too numerous to list here. Google the plants you are working with to learn organic methods for controlling bugs and disease. Some can be removed with a sharp spray of water from the hose. Some can be controlled with insecticidal soap. Some like squash bugs and tomato hornworms can be picked off and destroyed by hand. There are great companion planting methods—plant something that attracts the varmint away from your beloved vegetable. For example, plant marigolds with tomatoes.

**Observe** carefully. Gardening is about the pleasure of watching nature unfold before your eyes. And careful observation can catch a small infestation just in time or a tomato that is fully ripe or a bed that is too wet or dry before it destroys your crop.

This is all very basic information. Please refer to the Resources sheet for books and websites that can provide detailed growing instructions for every vegetable imaginable.

Above all, enjoy your adventure in the vegetable garden!

Santa Fe Seed Stewards, a project of Santa Fe Extension Master Gardeners. SFEMG.org