

MESSENGER-INQUIRER



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Considerations for Selecting Vegetable Seeds for the Garden
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To a gardener, a catalog or online site selling vegetable garden seeds is like deciding what to purchase in a candy store. With so many enticing choices, what do I select? Before going overboard buying seed, plant what you and your family likes, think about maturity dates, find disease-resistant cultivars, look for AAS winners, and consider space available in the garden.

First, select vegetables and cultivars you enjoy eating. Trying something new each year is a good idea, but don't go overboard in a small garden.

The maturity date, also written as days to maturity, indicates the average number of days before the crop is ready to harvest. This date determines when to plant the vegetable. Pay attention to determine if this refers to the length of time from starting seeds or planting transplants. Weather and growing conditions impact the actual harvest date. Earlier maturing cultivars produce an early harvest in the spring and are used in a fall garden when the growing season is shorter to produce a crop before frost. Check to see if the seed needs to be planted after the threat of a frost in the garden.

When selecting seeds, think about managing diseases in the garden. Look for the terms "tolerant" or "resistant" when selecting seed of any cultivar when it is available. Tolerant means the plant endures the disease while still producing a crop. Resistance means the plant has the natural

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ability to prevent or slow disease development and still produce vegetables. With disease resistance, the need for organic or synthetic chemical management is reduced or possibly eliminated. Examples of disease resistance to look for in tomatoes are Verticillium wilt, often represented by a V, and Fusarium wilt, represented by an F. These two soil-borne diseases are only managed by disease resistance. A number after these letters indicate the disease resistance is against a specific race of the same organism which causes the disease. Read the description of the vegetable cultivars to see what disease resistance they carry.

Consider disease resistance to what is common in the area. For example, early blight is a common disease of tomatoes. Cherry tomatoes with some resistance to early blight are ‘Jasper,’ ‘Matt’s Wild Cherry,’ ‘Mountain Magic,’ and ‘Sungold’ (yellow). Slicing-size tomatoes with some resistance to this disease are ‘Defiant,’ ‘Iron Lady,’ ‘Mountain Fresh Plus,’ ‘Mountain Merit,’ and ‘Stellar.’ Roma-type tomatoes with some early blight resistance are ‘Indigo Rose,’ ‘Plum Regal,’ and ‘Verona.’

Bacterial spot of peppers is common in this area, causing leaves to drop and producing spots on the fruit. Peppers with resistance to different races of this disease are ‘Boca,’ ‘Ninja,’ ‘Outsider,’ ‘Playmaker,’ ‘Samurai,’ and ‘Tracer.’

A symbol to look for in seed descriptions is a circle with AAS and Winner in a red banner representing the All-America Selections Winners. These cultivars are tested for performance across the United States. The winners have new and different desirable characteristics compared to other cultivars within the same crop.

Before selecting seed, determine the amount of space available to grow vegetables. Look for the description of the plant size. “Patio” often means it grows in less space and is possibly suitable for containers. Watch for cultivars of tomato, green bean, and sweet corn bred specifically for

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growing in raised beds or containers. Consider growing a bush-type pumpkin which usually has smaller fruit but takes up less space. Check the actual size of the plant in the description. The bush pumpkin may still be too big for the available space.

Tomatoes have two terms that describe their growth habit and affect their spatial requirements. Determinate means the plant reaches a specific size and then stops growing. The fruits on this plant ripen at about the same time. These plants are suitable for smaller spaces. Indeterminate means the tomato plant continues to grow. Both growth types need staking or caging since it is best to keep the tomato fruit off the ground. However, the indeterminate type needs a bigger support system. The benefit is a continuous harvest until frost or disease kills the plant.

After deciding what you want to grow, look for the number of seeds per package. To avoid buying too much, make a sketch of your garden space. Plan how many rows of certain vegetables to grow. Then look at the required spacing between each vegetable plant. When planting seeds, the plants are thinned to a final spacing because not all of the seeds will germinate. For example, summer squash is planted with 3 seeds to a hill spaced 4 feet apart. After the seeds germinate, remove one of the plants to allow space for the other two plants to grow. Bush-type green bean or snap bean seeds are planted 2 to 3 inches apart and thinned according to the variety. Usually, about a pound of bush snap bean seed is needed to plant 100 feet of row. If you have seeds left over, share them with a friend or store them in a cool dry location or in the refrigerator in a jar.

For more information about selecting vegetables, contact the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service at 270-685-8480 or annette.heisdorffer@uky.edu.

Annette's Tip:

Information about other disease-resistant cultivars can be found at <https://kentuckypestnews.wordpress.com/2025/01/21/ordering-seeds-for-vegetable-gardens-4/>.

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The SOW App is a tool available for Kentucky gardeners to assist with planting, sowing, and harvesting decisions for their home garden based on University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension publication ID-128. The tool is available in Apple and Google Play app stores.

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