

Order Your Garden Seeds Now!
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Marais des Cygnes District Master Gardener

Everyone is baking, and yeast is difficult to find. People are trying to can, and canning jars are difficult to find. People are trying to grow their own food, some for the first time, and some vegetable seeds are difficult to find.

Garden catalogs are already arriving and now is the time to send in your order. The seeds you would like may not be available in a couple of months.

Last year was unusual. I encountered several seed mishaps. Seeds purchased at a big box store didn't germinate. New varieties were already sold out in January. One order placed in January didn't arrive until late April.

“Today, most new varietal developments are generated by two dozen giants in the trade.” These companies are constantly trying to provide more value to their seeds. They grow hybrid varieties that usually have a patent. They want their seed to grow in a wide range of climates: Europe, North America, Australia. They make seeds pelleted, so large farmers can use machinery to plant. They incorporate insecticides and fungicides to improve germination. They also utilize gene transfer which makes the variety GMO (Genetically Modified Organism). They are not concentrating on taste.

Because there is a growing interest in growing vegetables and fruit organically and with good taste, it has opened a niche for smaller seed companies. The seeds from the giant companies usually do not fit the organic requirements. The smaller seed companies are growing their own organic seed and trialing varieties to be sure they grow in the local environment. Some companies, like Johnny's Selected Seeds, grow some of their own seeds and produce their own varieties. But the number of seed companies that do grow their own seeds is limited.

The seed companies order the amount of seed that they package based on their experience from previous years. Last year caught them by surprise. The Home and Garden section of The Washington Post had an article entitled: An onslaught of orders engulfs seed companies amid coronavirus fears. Because of the virus, not only were sales up but filling the orders from the warehouse was slow. Workers had to maintain social distancing in the warehouse, the phone banks and in packaging areas. Renee's Garden found a 300% increase in sale of vegetable and herb seed last year. They were shipping up to 1,900 seed packages per day. Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds, in Mansfield, MO, said they usually had a sales period from January to March. Last year they saw the sales period extended and sales up 50%. This year, because of the pandemic, they are not taking phone orders, only on-line orders.

Smaller companies, especially those in our local area, will probably increase their seed supply but you are likely to find some varieties out of stock. Oregon State University Extension suggested ordering early and predicting some seed shortages. Order now!

For more information contact the Marais des Cygne Extension office – Mound City 913-795-2829 or Paola – 913-294-4306.