

Seed packaging helps home gardening

UNIVERSITY PARK — Many oldtime gardeners remember when buying vegetable and flower seeds used to be a rather simple matter, says J. Robert Nuss, Extension horticulturist, Penn State.

Many seeds were sold in bulk and storeowners would weigh out what one needed. In recent years seed packets became popular and now pre-packaged units are

available for home gardeners.

Nuss says that gardeners now have a greater number of seed varieties to consider but they are also packaged in labor-saving forms to assist the gardener. Seeds are now available in packets, tapes, and blankets as well as pre-seeded pellets.

Here are some important factors to consider when one goes to the store to purchase

vegetable and flower seeds this season.

Small packets of seed are the least expensive of the newer forms in which seeds are sold. Most gardeners still prefer the loose seed over the quick-planting forms available. One problem with the individual seeds in packets is that each seed must be planted by hand. This is not too serious with beans, but the tiny

seeds of carrot, lettuce or radish are often a problem. There is also the possibility of planting seeds too close together or too deep in the soil. Heavy rains may wash the seeds out of their rows or cover them too deeply with washed soil.

Seed tapes and blankets help to eliminate many of the problems associated with the use of individual seeds. In the tapes or blankets the

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seeds are spaced at optimum distances to prevent crowding of the new seedlings after germination. The material around the seed allows one to develop straight rows of plants while holding the seed in place so it will not wash away. Since there is no risk of over-planting, thinning is not a major garden task later on, explains Nuss.

These tapes and blankets do not solve all gardening problems. There is more to it

than just rolling out the seed "carpet" and waiting for things to grow. The soil has to be prepared properly as one would with any other method of seeding. The seed tapes have to be spaced correctly for the crop and covered with the right amount of soil to assure good germination.

Another quick-planting unit is the pre-seeded pellet which is a cube of organic material and plant food. The seeds are already in the pellets when one buys them. Once the seeded pellets are placed in a shallow container all that is needed is water. Such units eliminate the need for sterile growing media, seed flats and the transplanting of seedlings. When it is time to plant into the garden, one just sets the pellet and its young seedling into the ground.

These new seed packaging methods may not be suited to all garden needs but they will help with some of the chores later in the season. One can check with seed catalogs and local seed stores for some of these quick-seeding and planting forms, adds Nuss.



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