Selecting Good Seeds or Plants

Selecting Seeds
Choosing and purchasing good-quality vegetable seeds is important to successful gardening. Seed purchased from a dependable seed company will provide a good start toward a bountiful harvest. Keep notes about the seeds you purchase: germination, vigor of plants and tendencies toward insects and disease. From this information you can determine which seed company best meets your needs and which varieties are most suitable for your area or gardening style.

Selecting Transplants
It is best to grow your own transplants if possible. This ensures you of having the variety and quantity you want, and having them available when you need them.

If you choose to buy transplants, it is important that you buy from a reputable dealer who will give you the assurance of high quality in his plants. Insist on fresh, stocky plants that are healthy, medium-size, have a deep green color and are free of diseases and nematodes. The best vegetable transplants are not necessarily the tallest and largest available. Do not buy diseased plants or plants that look yellow or wilted. You cannot start out with a sick plant and end up with a good, healthy garden. Gardening is hard work. Don't risk losing a good garden by planting inferior seed or setting bad plants.

Saving Seeds
Saving your own vegetable seed is fun. It offers a sense of self-sufficiency and saves money. You can maintain a variety that is not available commercially. There are certain considerations that should be kept in mind when saving seed, however. Hybrid varieties are not likely to be the same as the parent plants; therefore, only open-pollinated varieties should be used for home seed production. Some seed dealers have responded to the increasing interest in seed saving by clearly marking open-pollinated varieties in their catalogs. Another consideration in saving seed is the possibility of carrying seed-borne diseases into the next year's crop. Many commercially grown seeds are produced in the dry areas of the western United States. The climate there is less suitable to seed-borne diseases that may be present in South Carolina. Take care to control diseases which can be carried in seed. Another weather-related factor is the speed of drying of seeds, which can be adversely affected by frequent rains and/or humidity.

Finally, if you have ever saved squash seed during a season in which you had more than one type of squash planted, you have probably seen the weird results that may be obtained from cross-pollination. Saving seeds from cross-pollinated crops is not generally recommended for the novice because of problems with crossing between varieties. Cross-pollinated crops include squash, pumpkin, sweet corn, watermelon, cantaloupe and honeydew.

Excerpted from the South Carolina Master Gardener Training Manual, EC 678.

Prepared by Bob Polomski, Extension Consumer Horticulturist, and Debbie Shaughnessy, HGIC Horticulture Specialist, Clemson University. (New 03/99.)

This information is supplied with the understanding that no discrimination is intended and no endorsement by the Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service is implied. All recommendations are for South Carolina conditions and may not apply to other areas. Use pesticides only according to the directions on the label. All recommendations for pesticide use are for South Carolina only and were legal at the time of publication, but the status of registration and use patterns are subject to change by action of state and federal regulatory agencies. Follow all directions, precautions and restrictions that are listed.
The Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service offers its programs to people of all ages, regardless of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, marital or family status and is an equal opportunity employer. Clemson University Cooperating with U.S. Department of Agriculture, South Carolina Counties, Extension Service, Clemson, South Carolina. Issued in Furtherance of Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914.

Public Service Activities