Spruce Cottage Farm's

Periodic Newsletter

Winter 2019

Greetings Gardeners,

Here we are, approaching the end of winter; the sun is noticeably higher in the sky (when we can see it, that is!) and it is still light out at six o'clock: sure signs that we are moving through winter! The seed catalogues are also arriving in the mail, another sure sign that we are cycling through the seasons. I've been spending the last couple of weeks getting the seed order ready for the nursery and market garden. It is always a pleasure to peruse the seed catalogues and imagine the garden to come. Seed catalogues are also fonts of growing information; from germination instructions, to seeding and transplanting timing, to expected harvest time, to the history of a particular variety, there is always something to be learned (or re-learned) in the seed catalogue!

I grow a mix of open-pollinated and hybrid varieties. Open-pollinated seeds are produced by crossing two parent plants of the same variety (in the same species) to produce offspring (seeds) just like the parent plants. Open-pollinated varieties have generally been grown for many years. Hybrid seeds are produced by crossing two parent plants of different varieties within the same species. The resulting offspring (seeds) will have characteristics from both parents. It is important to note the difference between hybrid and genetically engineered: hybrid seeds are crosses between the same species and genetically engineered seeds are the result of manipulating DNA between different species. In our growing climate, I've found that hybrids are useful for varieties that take longer to mature or flower, such as cauliflower and petunia. I value open-pollinated varieties for their ability to adapt to variable growing conditions and as a seed-saver. Yields can be increased by using a hybrid variety, although hybrids do tend to require optimal growing conditions to thrive and the seed is generally more expensive and propagation-proprietary. While open-pollinated varieties may not have the yield of hybrids, they do not require growing conditions to be optimal in order to still provide a harvest, they are less expensive and any seed saved from them will be the same as the parent plants. I'll have my usual mix of hybrid and open-pollinated stand-bys at the nursery this year, as well as some new plants to try!

I've been thinking about seeds and their amazing-ness. Seeds come in an incredible range of shapes and sizes, from as small as a speck of dust to the size of a softball. They contain all of the genetic material to grow a living organism (indeed, seeds are themselves alive - they absorb oxygen and give off carbon dioxide). This living organism will then grow and mature its own seeds, perpetuating its genetic material and living on through the aeons. Seeds' diversity in size and shape is

explained when one thinks about how a seed moves from its mother-plant to elsewhere: all of the size and shape adaptations are there in order to move the seed beyond its mother-plant's territory, increasing its plant's chances of survival and expansion - pretty much mind-blowing when you really think about it.

Seeds also have many adaptations to weather the weather, so to speak! Seeds tend to be produced at the end of the growing season. As such, many seeds have hard seed coats (such as sweet peas and morning glory) to protect through wet weather and prevent germination when growing conditions aren't ideal. Other seeds have biomechanical recording mechanisms to prevent germination until a certain period of cold temperature has passed (such as pansy), allowing these seeds to remain dormant through the winter months until the warmer temperatures of spring. Understanding the adaptations to weather that seeds have allows us to control germination until the optimal time for our vegetable gardens, flower pots and herb beds. Scarification is the process of chipping the hard seed coat to aid the absorption of water and thereby promoting germination. Stratification is the process of chilling seed for a certain period before germination in order to break the seed's dormant period. Some seeds require light for germination (meaning, they don't get covered with soil) and some seeds require dark for germination (meaning they get covered with soil and then newspaper or other opaque material). Seed packages should list any special germination requirements for a particular plant.

I am working on the 2019 Plant List and Order Form and should have the PDF format ready to send out the beginning of March. In the meantime, I'll be seeding pansies, petunias and lobelia in the very near future and everything else at the beginning of March. I'm looking forward to another growing season and am really excited to share my new greenhouse (and nursery location) with everyone! I will have a small selection of direct-seeded vegetable and herb seeds for sale this year too, watch for the list towards the end of February. The first day of the nursery will be Friday, May 3 and I'll be sure to send out all relevant information closer to opening day!

In Growing Harmony,

Jolene

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