

The 10 Best Seed Companies for Heirloom and Non-GMO Seeds

Compiled by Gabriel Howarth for Plant Aloha April 15, 2017

There are surely hundreds of great, family-owned seed businesses I have never heard of out there—and new companies seem to pop up every day. I can only recommend the companies whose seeds I have

If you have any questions about a seed company that is not listed here or on the Safe Seed Pledge list, just give them a call!

I recommend that you consider your values, your gardening needs and your local climate/region when choosing your seed sources.

Seed Savers Exchange (Decorah, IA)

The Seed Savers Exchange (SSE) is a non-profit organization working to save heirloom garden seed from extinction. Their focus is on preserving varieties of seed that gardeners and farmers brought to North America when their families immigrated, and traditional varieties grown by American Indians, Mennonites and the Amish.

SSE's 8,000 members grow heirloom varieties of vegetables, fruits and grains, and offer them for exchange to other members in their amazing annual yearbook that has over 450 pages. You can find almost extinct varieties of seed to try in your garden, and all the money you spend with the Seed Saver's Exchange goes to helping protect seed biodiversity.

This is, hands-down, my favorite place to look for seeds and exciting new plant varieties for my garden.

Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds (Mansfield, MO)

Baker Creek is a family-owned business offering a gorgeous catalog and website with over 1,800 varieties of vegetables, flowers and herbs—one of the largest selections of heirloom varieties in the U.S.

Baker Creek also carries one of the largest selections of seeds from the 19th century, including many Asian and European varieties. They also specialize in rare and hard-to-find heirloom seeds from over 75 different countries. The company's mission is to promote and preserve our agricultural and culinary heritage.

Clear Creek Seeds (Hulbert, OK)

Clear Creek is a small, family-owned business specializing exclusively in open-pollinated, heirloom seed varieties, including flowers, herbs and vegetables. They also offer several variety packs for even more value, like the Pollinator Pack and the Salsa Pack.

They have a smaller selection, but as a small company, they are able to provide warm, highly personal customer service, great prices and fast delivery.

Southern Exposure Seed Exchange (Mineral, VA)

Southern Exposure Seed Exchange offers more than 700 varieties of vegetable, flower, herb, grain and cover crop seeds. They emphasize varieties that perform well in the Mid-Atlantic and Southeast, and offer many unusual Southern heirlooms, such as yacon, amaranths including peanuts, southern peas, naturally colored cotton, collards, okra, roselle, turnip greens, corns for roasting and meal, and butterbeans.

Fedco Seeds (Waterville, ME)

Fedco is a cooperative business where consumer members own 60 percent, and employee members own 40 percent. Because the cooperative doesn't have an individual owner, profit isn't its primary goal, so their seeds and other products are quite affordable.

Fedco evaluates hundreds of varieties of hybrid, open-pollinated and heirloom seeds and plants at multiple sites, identifying the ones that are particularly productive, flavorful and suited to the northeastern U.S. climate.

Renee's Garden Seeds (Felton, CA)

Renee's Garden Seeds is a small company run by gardeners for gardeners. Renee Shepherd personally hand-picks and sells only the varieties that are very special for home gardeners, based on great flavor, easy culture and exceptional garden performance. All their seeds are time-tested heirlooms, the best international hybrids or fine open-pollinated varieties tested and guaranteed for every major U.S. climate zone.

The individually written seed packets offer beautiful watercolor portraits, with personally written descriptions, complete growing instructions, a quick-view planting chart, growing tips, harvesting information and cooking ideas.

Peaceful Valley Farm & Garden Supply (Grass Valley, CA)

Peaceful Valley is a seed company dedicated to organic food production that carries a large assortment of veggie seeds, cover crops, native grasses, pasture and lawn seed, wildflowers, fruit trees and berries, potatoes, onions and garlic. They also offer a great selection of gardening tools, pest control, season-extending products, composting supplies, growing, propagating and irrigation equipment, and books.

Peaceful Valley offers special pricing programs for farmers, school gardens and landscaping businesses.

Johnny's Selected Seeds (Winslow, ME)

Johnny's is a large, well-known employee-owned seed company that has more than 1,200 varieties of hybrid, open pollinated and heirloom vegetables, medicinal, culinary herbs and flowers. If you are

homesteading, farming or market gardening, they offer large quantities of seed, as well as a variety of cover crops to keep your soil in good shape.

Johnny's also has high quality gardening tools, equipment and accessories, cover crop seed, soil amendments and organic pest control products. Their extensive site and catalog is full of detailed growing instructions and helpful tips, even if you don't buy seeds from them.

Territorial Seed Company (Cottage Grove, OR)

Territorial Seed is a large, family-owned company whose mission is to improve people's self-sufficiency and independence by enabling gardeners to produce an abundance of good tasting, fresh from-the-garden food. They trial and evaluate all their seeds at their farms, and the live plants that they offer are raised in their farm greenhouses. They offer hybrid, open-pollinated and heirloom seed varieties.

Territorial's germination standards are higher than prescribed by the Federal Seed Act and their farm is certified USDA Organic, Biodynamic® by Demeter USA, and Salmon-Safe by Salmon-Safe Inc. They have a 100% satisfaction guarantee.

Seeds of Change (Rancho Dominguez, CA)

Seeds of Change was acquired by the Mars company, which has supported GMOs in their food products. Unfortunately, since the demand for healthy, organic products is so high, many organic brands (like Annie's, Erewhon, Horizon, Plum Organics, and more) have been bought out by large industrial food corporations (like General Mills, Coca-Cola, etc.) who want a piece of the market.

It's up to you to decide if you want to continue to purchase these brands, despite their new ownership.

However, ownership notwithstanding, you should know that Seeds of Change offers 100% certified organic open-pollinated, hybrid and heirloom seeds, and they grow all their own seeds on their research farm or within their network of organic farmers. They have also signed the Safe-Seed Pledge.

The reason I mention them here is that, because they have the marketing power of a large corporation behind them, you can get their seeds at Home Depot, Lowe's, Walmart, Whole Foods, and lots of other retail chains. Seeds of Change is the only organic, open-pollinated seed company available at mainstream stores nation-wide, which makes organic, open-pollinated seed accessible to anyone— including the majority of people who haven't considered the value of organic, open-pollinated seeds before.

So if you don't shop online (like my mom), or you're new to gardening and don't know where to start, you can easily pick up Seeds of Change organic, open-pollinated seeds for your garden while you are out running errands.

Seed Savers Exchange: Crop-Specific Seed Saving Guide

Common Name	Scientific Name	Pollination	Life Cycle	Selfing or Outbreeding	Isolation Distance	Population Size	Seed Maturity	Notes
Arugula	<i>Eruca sativa</i>	insects	A	O	1600 ft	80	after	
Basil	<i>Ocimum basilicum</i>	insects	A	O	1600 ft	80	after	
Bean, common	<i>Phaseolus vulgaris</i>	self	A	VS	10 ft	10-20	market or after	
Bean, fava	<i>Vicia faba</i>	self, insects	A	SO	800 ft	40	after	
Bean, Lima	<i>Phaseolus lunatus</i>	self, insects	A	S	40 ft	40	market or after	
Bean, runner	<i>Phaseolus coccineus</i>	self, insects	A	SO	800 ft	40	market or after	
Bean, cowpea	<i>Vigna unguiculata</i>	self, insects	A	SO	160 ft	40	market	
Beet	<i>Beta vulgaris</i>	wind	B	O	3200 ft	80	after	crosses w/ Swiss chard
Broccoli	<i>Brassica oleracea</i>	insects	B	VO	1600 ft	80	after	crosses w/ other <i>B. oleracea</i>
Brussels Sprouts	<i>Brassica oleracea</i>	insects	B	VO	1600 ft	80	after	crosses w/ other <i>B. oleracea</i>
Cabbage	<i>Brassica oleracea</i>	insects	B	VO	1600 ft	80	after	crosses w/ other <i>B. oleracea</i>
Carrot	<i>Daucus carota</i>	insects	B	O	1600 ft	200	after	crosses w/ Queen Anne's Lace
Cauliflower	<i>Brassica oleracea</i>	insects	B	VO	1600 ft	80	after	crosses w/ other <i>B. oleracea</i>
Celery	<i>Apium graveolens</i>	insects	B	O	1600 ft	80	after	crosses w/ celeriac
Celeriac	<i>Apium graveolens</i>	insects	B	O	1600 ft	80	after	crosses w/ celery
Chard, Swiss	<i>Beta vulgaris</i>	wind	B	O	3200 ft	80	after	crosses w/ beets
Cilantro	<i>Coriandrum sativum</i>	insects	A	O	1600 ft	80	after (when coriander)	
Collards	<i>Brassica oleracea</i>	insects	B	VO	1600 ft	80	after	crosses w/ other <i>B. oleracea</i>
Corn	<i>Zea mays</i>	wind	A	O	1600 ft	200	market or after	
Cucumber	<i>Cucumis sativus</i>	insects	A	O	1600 ft	10-20	after	
Dill	<i>Anethum graveolens</i>	insects	A	O	1600 ft	80	after	
Eggplant	<i>Solanum melongena</i>	insects	A	O	1600 ft	80	after	
Kale, European	<i>Brassica oleracea</i>	insects	B	VO	1600 ft	80	after	crosses w/ other <i>B. oleracea</i>
Kale, Siberian	<i>Brassica napus</i>	insects	B	VO	1600 ft	80	after	crosses w/ rutabaga
Leek	<i>Allium ampeloprasum</i>	insects	B	O	1600 ft	80	after	short-lived seeds
Lettuce	<i>Lactuca sativa</i>	self	A	VS	10 ft	10-20	after	
Melon	<i>Cucumis melo</i>	insects	A	O	1600 ft	10-20	after	crosses w/ Armenian cuke

Seed Savers Exchange: Crop-Specific Seed Saving Guide

Mustard Greens	<i>Brassica oleracea</i>	insects	A or B	VO	1600 ft	80	after	crosses w/ other <i>B. oleracea</i>
Okra	<i>Abelmoschus esculentum</i>	self, insects	A	SO	800 ft	40	after	
Onion	<i>Allium Cepa</i>	insects	B	O	1600 ft	200	after	short-lived seeds
Parsley	<i>Petroselinium crispum</i>	insects	B	O	1600 ft	80	after	
Parsnip	<i>Pastinaca sativa</i>	insects	B	O	1600 ft	80	after	short-lived seeds
Pea	<i>Pisum sativum</i>	self	A	VS	10 ft	10-20	market or after	
Pepper, hot	<i>Capsicum spp.</i>	self, insects	A	SO	800 ft	40	market	
Pepper, sweet	<i>Capsicum annuum</i>	self, insects	A	S	160 ft	10-20	market	
Pumpkin	<i>Cucurbita spp.</i>	insects	A	O	1600 ft	10-20	market	check species for potential crossing
Radicchio	<i>Cichorium intybus</i>	insects	B	VO	1600 ft	80	after	
Radish	<i>Raphanus sativus</i>	insects	A	VO	1600 ft	80	after	
Rutabaga	<i>Brassica napus</i>	insects	B	VO	1600 ft	80	after	crosses w/ Siberian kale
Spinach	<i>Spinacea oleracea</i>	wind	A	VO	3200 ft	80	after	
Squash, summer	<i>Cucurbita pepo</i>	insects	A	O	1600 ft	10-20	after	crosses w/ other <i>C. pepo</i>
Squash, winter	<i>Cucurbita pepo</i>	insects	A	O	1600 ft	10-20	market	crosses w/ other <i>C. pepo</i>
Squash, winter	<i>Cucurbita maxima</i>	insects	A	O	1600 ft	10-20	market	
Squash, winter	<i>Cucurbita moschata</i>	insects	A	O	1600 ft	10-20	market	
Squash, winter	<i>Cucurbita argyrosperma</i>	insects	A	O	1600 ft	10-20	market	
Tomato, modern	<i>Solanum lycopersicum</i>	self, insects	A	VS	10 ft	10-20	market	crosses w/ other <i>S. lycopersicum</i>
Tomato, potato-leaf	<i>Solanum lycopersicum</i>	self, insects	A	S	40 ft	10-20	market	crosses w/ other <i>S. lycopersicum</i>
Tomato, currant	<i>Solanum pimpinelifolium</i>	self, insects	A	SO	160 ft	40	market	
Turnip	<i>Brassica rapa</i>	insects	B	VO	1600 ft	80	after	crosses w/ many Asian greens
Watermelon	<i>Citrullus lanatus</i>	insects	A	O	1600 ft	10-20	market	

adapted from *A Seed Saving Guide for Gardeners and Farmers*, Organic Seed Alliance

Life Cycle: A = annual, B = biennial

Selfing or Outbreeding: VS = very self-pollinating, S = somewhat self-pollinating, SO = can be self-pollinating, but is often outbreeding, O = mostly outbreeding, VO = requires outbreeding

Isolation Distance: isolation distances are for home gardener use and will eliminate cross-pollination MOST of the time – however, more distance may be advisable if absolute purity is required

Population Size: keep in mind that the listed population sizes are for commercial production; home gardeners may have to grow fewer plants as garden space dictates, though particularly rare varieties should be grown close to recommended population sizes

Maturity: market = seeds are ready when fruit is ripe, after = seeds mature after fruit/plant is typically eaten (if listed as 'market or after,' market refers to a dry market stage (such as dry beans, flint/flour/pop corn, soup peas, etc).