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# ASK A MASTER GARDENER

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## ORGANIC SEEDS

*By Trish Grenfell, Placer County Master Gardener*

**Q** What is the difference between organic seeds and the old-fashioned regular seeds? Can you recommend what to buy?

**A** Organic seed is harvested from plants that are grown organically. In terms of germination and seedling health, the difference is not drastic between organic and non-organic seeds.

However, consider the following in making your decision. Commercially available seeds are a crop and are not harvested from plants grown for food. Non-organic seed crops are very heavy users of synthetic agricultural fertilizers and pesticides because they are in the ground longer (they have to “go to seed”) and have less chemical restrictions than food crops.

According to Dr. John Navazio, a geneticist and organic seed researcher for the University of Washington, plants grown from organic seeds are “tougher” than those from non-organic seeds. Organic seeds' parent plants have to thrive in organic growing conditions, where they are not cultivated with fertilizers or protected with pesticides. Plants are required to provide more of their own defense. Their offspring are well-equipped to thrive in a similar setting. This is especially important to consider if you garden organically yourself.

Because the demand for organic seed is still relatively small, there hasn't been as much research and development of organic varieties. Therefore the advantage of non-organic seed is the wider range of varieties to choose from. But on the other hand, if you and others purchase organic seeds, the increased demand will lead to an increase in variety selection. Increased development and availability of organic seed will happen only if gardeners demand more.

If you are looking for sources of organic seed, including one in Grass Valley and one in Stockton, read the publication by Cindy Fake, Horticulture & Small Farms Advisor, Nevada & Placer Counties:  
<http://ceplacer.ucdavis.edu/files/67891.pdf> . Or call the hotline and ask a Master Gardener to send it to you.

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