



GENERAL INFORMATION: **SAFE SEED**

Purchasing commercially-grown seed can be convenient and practical. However, with genetic modification becoming more common, all commercial seed is not created equal. Here are some steps you can take to ensure you are purchasing seed that promotes ecological and human health.

HOW COULD SEEDS BE UNSAFE?

Choosing seed varieties involves picking the best crops for the climate and conditions of your garden site. In the city and surrounding communities, this means finding seeds that can perform well in tough conditions; the urban environment can be hotter, drier, and the soil quality is generally not as good as in rural areas. Urban-grown crops need to be productive and disease resistant, to make the most of limited growing space.

Beyond the practicalities of crop performance, however, there is another layer. Genetically modified (GM) seeds are now the standard for commodity crops. GM seeds include DNA from different species than the crop that is being grown. The long-term implications of this genetic manipulation are unknown. In fact, a host of troubling facts surround GM seeds.

- The majority of GM crops, and the herbicides used to grow them, are owned by one enormous corporation: Monsanto.
- Farms that plant GM crops become dependent on spraying increasingly higher levels of herbicide, which finds its way into drinking water and processed foods, as well as destroying native



AN EDIBLE SCHOOLYARD PITTSBURGH STUDENT REMOVES SEEDS FROM A SUNFLOWER HEAD

plants that would harbor beneficial insects.

For instance, the decline of monarch butterflies is linked to the lack of native milkweed family plants – the species' only food – due to excessive spraying of herbicides.

- Genetically engineered crops have not been proven to produce more than traditional crops.
- GM crops are expensive when compared with comparable non-GM crops, and they are patented. A farmer is prohibited by law from saving their own seeds, whether they are left over from the planting season or derived from the crops themselves.
- “Genetic drift” commonly occurs, as GM crops spread their genetic information through pollination with non-GM crops. Farmers with all intentions of avoiding GM crops have been successfully sued by Monsanto for genetic information found in their crops due to wind-pollination from GM fields.
- There has been inadequate research proving the long-term safety of GM crops.

Based on our vision of envisioning the day where everyone in our city and region grows and eats fresh, local, and healthy food, Grow Pittsburgh has determined that we cannot support the proliferation of costly seed that requires excessive inputs and may harm human health. For this reason, we have made a decision as an organization to avoid purchasing and planting seeds connected directly or indirectly to Monsanto.

Monsanto, the corporation that develops and owns more GM seeds than any other, also owns the rights to many common and reliable non-GM crop varieties. So it's with mixed feelings that we have let go some of our favorite seeds, in order to cut all ties, no matter how indirect, with Monsanto.



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It can be very difficult to determine which seeds are connected to Monsanto, as their vegetable seeds are sourced through subsidiaries, De Ruiter and Seminis. Many seed companies we work with have stopped sourcing from any Monsanto-connected company, but some still carry a few seeds from these subsidiary companies.

HOW TO FIND SAFE SEED

If you're interested in avoiding GM crops or crops associated with Monsanto, there are a few steps you can take.

- First of all, check to see if the seed company you're purchasing from has signed the Safe Seed Pledge. This statement indicates that the seed company will not knowingly sell any genetically modified seed.
- Some seed companies, like High Mowing and Fedco, go beyond the Safe Seed Pledge and refuse to purchase seeds from Monsanto or any of its subsidiaries. These companies often have clear statements on their websites.
- If you want to avoid all Monsanto companies and can't find information about a seed company's suppliers, a quick email or call to the company

can help get you the info you need. Companies that carry seeds from a Monsanto-owned company will be able to give you a list of what varieties this includes.

- If you'd like to determine whether a particular variety is owned by Monsanto, do a search on the Seminis and De Ruiter websites.
- If you are simply concerned with avoiding GM seeds, you can opt for certified organic seed, as organic standards do not allow for genetic modification.

For more information about genetic modification, which types of crops may be genetically modified, and how GMOs compare with conventional crops, check out these resources:

- [RODALE FARMING SYSTEMS 30-YEAR TRIAL \(ORGANIC VS CONVENTIONAL AGRICULTURAL FIELDS PLANTED SIDE BY SIDE\)](#)
- [CONSUMER REPORTS: WHERE GMOs HIDE IN FOOD](#)
- [THE NON-GMO PROJECT](#)