



## Garden Tips: Sourcing Seeds

As winter approaches, urban harvesters can look forward to one seasonal joy in particular: garden planning! There's a lot to consider when dreaming and scheming about your upcoming garden, and in the upcoming weeks we'll delve into various related topics.

One of the basic needs for next year's garden is seed. Most seed companies have an online ordering option, but we think that not much can rival cozying up with seed catalog in hand. Many seed catalogs also contain a wealth of planting advice. So to make sure you can request and receive seed catalogs in time to place seed orders, we're listing some of our choice seed company picks now. Click on the links below to access the online page for requesting a catalog.

We recommend purchasing organic seed, to support organic farming of seed crops and its benefits to human health and the environment, compared to conventional seed farming. However, to grow a garden that can be considered organic it is not absolutely necessary to purchase organic seed. Certified organic farmers are required to search for organic versions of all the seed they purchase. If they are unable to find organic offerings of a particular variety – after checking at least three sources, they are permitted to purchase non-organic seed. Non-organic seed does not generally carry chemicals or other harmful attributes; it was simply grown in non-organic conditions. Please note, however, that some coated and *all* treated seed is non-organic and cannot be used in organic gardens.

Genetic engineering is another seed consideration. In genetically modified (GMO) seeds, genes from another species have been spliced into the DNA, so that a desirable characteristic is exhibited in the crop. As different species by definition cannot interbreed and produce fertile offspring, this merging cannot happen by traditional plant breeding. Most GMO seeds are created to be resistant to an herbicide (so that the crop will survive when a field is blanketed in a chemical which kills other plants), or to produce their own insecticide.

As our Grow Pittsburgh mission revolves around promoting *responsible* urban agriculture, we choose our seed companies carefully, to avoid those that distribute GMO seed. Grow Pittsburgh has made this decision for many reasons. At this point in time, GMOs have not been proven to increase yield significantly beyond that of traditionally saved or hybridized seed. The safety of GMO seed is still in question, as genetically engineered seeds have not been in existence for enough time to do long-term studies on human health. Finally, Monsanto, the company which holds patents on 90% of genetically modified seed, has a negative human rights and environmental record, in the US as well as worldwide.

Based on the undesirable and uncertain aspects of GMOs and the company that creates them, Grow Pittsburgh chooses seed that is not genetically modified, and supports seed companies that do not sell GMO seed. All of the seed companies listed below have signed the [Safe Seed Pledge](#), assuring that they do not knowingly sell genetically engineered seeds or plants.

- [Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds](#)
- [Fedco Seeds](#) – also affiliated: Fedco Bulbs, Fedco Trees, Moose Tubers, Organic Grower's Supply
- [Heirloom Seeds](#)

- [High Mowing Seeds](#)
- [Johnny's Selected Seeds](#)
- [Renee's Garden Seeds](#) (no print catalog)
- [Seed Savers Exchange](#)
- [Southern Exposure Seeds](#)