Tid Bits!
sharing Horticulture/Conservation Tips!

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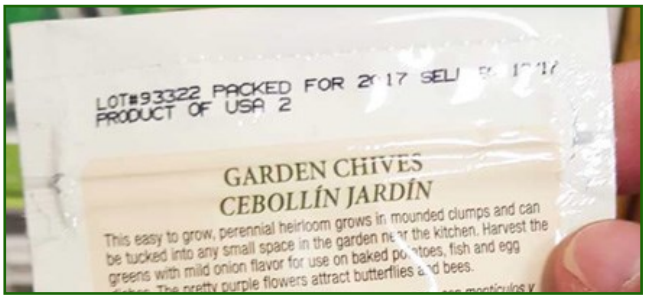
IS THIS SEED STILL GOOD?

One of the joys of early spring is deciding what seeds to plant. If you are like me you probably still have some on your shelf from last year (or admit it, maybe even older). Are they any good?

Seed packages will give you some information. Like food products, they are packed fresh. They will typically have a stamp with the current year they were packed and a "sell by" date. You may also see a specific month of expiration.



However, according to the **Oregon State University Extension Service**, seed packets may last up to four years, depending upon plant type and storage conditions. Seeds should be stored in cool, dry, dark conditions. Place the seeds in an airtight, watertight container such as a jar with a rubber seal (like a baby food jar or canning jar) or a zip lock bag inside a jar. To keep the seeds cool (ideally, below 50 degrees), some people store them in a jar in their refrigerator or freezer.

When retrieving seeds from storage, allow the container to reach room temperature before opening it. This will help prevent condensation from forming on the seeds and inside the container. If you are uncertain about whether seeds will germinate, you can do an easy germination test.

1. Count out a specific number of seeds, anywhere from ten to one hundred seeds.
2. Moisten a paper towel or a coffee filter and place the seeds on it.
3. Fold or roll up the moistened paper over the seeds, making sure that the seeds don't touch each other, and put the paper inside a plastic bag in a warm place.
4. Check the seeds after two or three days and then every day thereafter for a week or so. Spray the paper as need to maintain moisture.

5. After the standard germination period has passed (as provided on the seed packet), count to see how many seeds have germinated and calculate the percentage of germination by dividing the number of seeds germinated by the number of seeds tested.
6. Compare the germination percentage to the germination rate (if there is one) on the seed packet label. If the seed germination rate is high, then the seeds are fine to plant. If the germination rate is low, you may want to purchase new seeds.

   Seeds in good condition and stored properly will last at least one year and, depending on the plant, may last two to five years. One source identified quite a few tables on the internet indicating the average shelf life of vegetable and flower seeds that are properly stored. Those sources are listed below. Here is a shorter version for a variety of vegetable seeds:

   1 year: onions, parsnips, parsley, salsify, and spinach

   2 years: corn, peas, beans, chives, okra, dandelion

   3 years: carrots, leeks, asparagus, turnips, rutabagas

   4 years: peppers, chard, pumpkins, squash, watermelons, basil, artichokes and cardoons

   5 years: most brassicas, beets, tomatoes, eggplant, cucumbers, muskmelons, celery, celeriac, lettuce, endive, chicory

Source: https://ucanr.edu/blogs/blogcore/postdetail.cfm?postnum=12950

Sources for seed viability tables:

Vegetable seeds

Iowa State University Extension: http://www.ipm.iastate.edu/ipm/hortnews/1995/3-3-1995/seedv.html

Virginia Cooperative Extension: http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-316/426-316.html

Vegetable and flower seeds

Clear Creek Seeds: http://www.clearcreekseeds.com/seed-viability-chart/

Hill Gardens: http://hillgardens.com/seed_longevity.htm

Johnny's Selected Seeds http://www.johnnyseeds.com/t-faq.aspx#questionshelflife