

Community



Easy with the Growing the Instant Organic Gardener Organic seeds, summer growing news

by Don Rosenberg

As many of you know, my goal for this monthly column is to make organic vegetable gardening so easy anyone can do it. But I also want to help you save money in your garden and steer you away from products and services that are unnecessary or expensive.

But is it organic?

One of the most common questions I field is, "Are these seeds organic?" The assumption is only organic seeds can be used in an organic garden.

I'm a huge fan of the green/organic movement, but I'm very disappointed with organic seeds. They are extremely expensive and contain fewer seeds per package. What makes your garden organic is the way the seeds are *grown*, not whether the seeds are organic. In fact, unless the seeds were grown on Three Mile Island or Love Canal, they're fine. Just avoid using synthetic fertilizers and pesticides in your garden.

The same questions always crop up when buying transplants: "Are they organic?" I recommend using transplants for your summer garden's tomatoes, eggplants and peppers. This allows you to avoid all the work of trying to sprout seeds inside, keeping them alive and hearty so they can be planted outside without dropping dead

from shock.

There is a bit more concern about using transplants, since growers might use synthetic fertilizers in the potting mix. Honestly, once your plant is in



Nothing beats the taste of Carolina-grown strawberries, in season now.

the soil, the tiny amount of synthetic fertilizer will make no real difference. So support local growers at nurseries, garden centers and farmers' markets and you'll be able to try out several different varieties of each crop.

Vie for climbing varieties

Another way to get your money's worth for your summer plants is to go with climbing varieties instead of "bush" varieties. This applies to tomatoes, cucumbers, green beans and lima beans. A bush variety grows to a certain

size, produces all its fruit and then stops growing. They were designed for farmers with single crops in huge fields. These farmers want plants on which all the fruit matures at the same time so they can run a tractor and harvest them all at once.

In a home garden, we don't want all our tomatoes or beans to mature over a two-week period. We want to enjoy our vegetables for as long as possible, and we have the time to pick our produce by hand.

But the most important thing to know about bush varieties is they were bred for their size and maturity properties, not for flavor. Most people feel that the original "pole" varieties taste better than their bushy cousins.

Buy local berries

Finally, the other item on my list is strawberries. If you're like me, you don't even bother to buy or eat strawberries from Florida or California. They are often picked green and gassed to make them ripen. The result is a tasteless berry that's white on the inside.

The good news is Carolina strawberries are in season right now. Their taste is heavenly and they're really good for you. The only bad news

is they are so susceptible to pests and diseases there's almost no way to grow organic strawberries on a commercial basis. But in my opinion, the taste and nutrition outweighs any concerns about pesticides. Most local growers try to minimize their use anyway. So ask for them at local natural foods stores, farmers' markets and local roadside stands. Once you've tasted a Carolina berry, you'll never go back. □

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