



FROM THE FILES OF THE DIRT DIVA DIARIES

## Seed Packet Decoder

Your Guide to Cryptic Seed Packet Jargon

**Confused by those mysterious symbols and terms on seed packets?** You're not alone! This quick reference decodes every label, symbol, and bit of fine print so you can choose the right seeds for YOUR garden. Keep this handy during seed shopping season!

### \* THE BIG ONE: FROST DATES

#### Understanding Last Frost & First Frost Dates

##### Last Frost Date

The average date of the LAST frost in your area in spring. This is when it's safe to plant tender plants like tomatoes, peppers, basil, and squash outdoors.

##### First Frost Date

The average date of the FIRST frost in your area in fall. After this date, tender plants will die. Plant cold-hardy crops like lettuce, spinach, and kale around now.

##### Your Hardiness Zone

A number (like 5, 6, or 7) that tells you what plants can survive your winters. Find yours at [planthardiness.ars.usda.gov](http://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov). Your local extension office also has this info!

### \* SUN REQUIREMENTS ON SEED PACKETS

#### What Those Sun Symbols Mean

##### Full Sun \*\*\*

6+ hours of DIRECT sunlight per day. Afternoon sun counts as more potent than morning sun. Most veggies love this!

##### Partial Sun/Shade \*\*

3-6 hours of direct sunlight. Lettuce, spinach, and some herbs do great here. Morning sun is best; afternoon shade helps in hot climates.

##### Shade \*

Less than 3 hours of direct sunlight. Most veggies will struggle, but leafy greens and some herbs can tolerate this.

### ■ DAYS TO MATURITY: THE SECRET CODE

#### What "50 Days to Maturity" Really Means

When a seed packet says "50 days to maturity," it's talking about **SUN DAYS**, not calendar days. Here's the difference:

##### Sun Day

A day when your plant gets at least 6 hours of good sunlight. Afternoon sun is more potent than morning sun.

##### Rainy Days Don't Count!

Those spring showers? Nope. They don't count toward your 50 days. So a 40-day plant will actually mature faster than a 50-day plant because it's more flexible.

##### In Practice

A 50-day tomato planted in May might not be ready until late June or early July. Don't panic if you're still waiting on day 60 — Mother Nature's in control!

### ✂ SPACING DIAGRAMS (THOSE TINY CHARTS ON THE PACKET)

## Reading Spacing Instructions

Those little diagrams aren't just decorative — they're crucial! They show:

### Row Spacing

Distance between ROWS (the lines you plant in). Example: 12 inches between rows of lettuce.

### Plant Spacing

Distance between INDIVIDUAL PLANTS in a row. Example: 6 inches apart for lettuce plants.

### Why It Matters

Plant too close together and they compete for nutrients, water, and light. Plant too far apart and you waste space. Follow the packet!

## HEIRLOOM VS. HYBRID: WHAT'S THE DEAL?

### Decoding Seed Types

#### Heirloom

Old varieties passed down for generations. Open-pollinated (breed true). If you save seeds, next year's plants will be identical. Great for flavor and uniqueness!

#### Hybrid (F1)

Created by crossing two parent plants for specific traits (like disease resistance or bigger yields). NOT GMO! BUT seeds don't breed true — save the seed and you might get surprises next year.

#### GMO

Scientists alter the plant's DNA. Different from hybrids! Most seed packets available to home gardeners are NOT GMO (check the label if it matters to you).

## PLANTING DEPTH & STARTING INDOORS

### Those Confusing Instructions

#### "Start Indoors"

Plant these seeds in pots under grow lights 6-8 weeks before your last frost date. Transplant seedlings outdoors after frost danger passes.

#### "Direct Sow"

Plant seeds directly in the ground where you want them to grow. Usually for fast growers like radishes, beans, peas, and lettuce.

#### Depth Numbers

Example: "Plant ¼ inch deep" or "Plant 1 inch deep." Don't ignore this! Too deep and seeds won't germinate. Too shallow and they'll dry out.

### ✦ Pro Tips for Seed Packet Success

- **Take a photo:** Snap pics of the front and back of every packet. You'll forget what you planted by July!
- **Check the date:** Buy FRESH seeds. Last year's leftovers might not germinate well.
- **Compare varieties:** Packets show maturity dates so you can choose fast growers or late bloomers based on your timeline.
- **Follow spacing:** Those diagrams aren't suggestions — they're the secret to happy, healthy plants!