

The second session with the Fedco seed catalog was all about next spring's garden. There is always some new feature of the catalog that I find very useful. This year, there were several. And, some of the enclosed boxes at the bottoms of various pages contained information that one might think would be ignored by a company, or a cooperative like Fedco, since they are in the business of selling seeds. But right there, in black in white, on pages 12, 37, 42, 55, 59, 68, and 78, and also perhaps on some pages I missed, instructions for saving one's own seeds are given. We have done some of this for years, and it reduces the cost of the seed order each spring. So, if Fedco shows its customers how to save seeds, it obviously has other aims besides just selling people more and more seeds.

The catalog has another chart that is also helpful. We all have qualms about using our old garden seeds and sometimes, we buy more than we need as a safeguard. Fedco has a little chart that shows how long seeds of various garden plants are viable. So, we know not to keep forever onion seeds. In fact, they need to be new each year to ensure a crop. Tomato seeds, on the other hand, are good for five to ten years. There is a similar chart for flower and herb seeds.

I have a nearly 90 year old book that affords me lots of chuckles and some interesting information. *The Country Kitchen*, by Della Lutes, was published in the 1930s, but it concerns life on a southern Michigan farm in the late 1800s. The author described how her father approached the garden seed order:

“For days—and evenings as well—my father pored over these catalogues. It was his custom to make out, first, a list of everything he would *like* to get, which included pretty much everything in the book. Then, appalled by the sum total of such extravagance, he would, with regret, cut out all the extras, the new, untried, interesting things, and content himself with familiars, adding just a *few* of the improvements on old friends. This list he and my mother would discuss at length.”

“And so on until, hewed and whittled down to meet the limited budget, the list was finally made out in my father's fine flourishing hand, the money order bought, and the letter sent.”

“...Two weeks,—three weeks,—and finally, late in February, it would arrive, that eagerly awaited package pregnant with flavor, color, taste, odor, nutriment, in little bags and envelopes, labeled

with names lovely to the ear.”

Like Della Lutes’ father, Lije Thompson, we whittle and hew our seed order, limiting varieties new to us to just a few. “Dazzling Blue” kale was circled in our seed catalog as I had made a preliminary selection of that entry. Then, though, I looked in our seed drawer and found plenty of kale seeds. The seed viability chart told me that kale seeds are good for three to five years. I Xed out Dazzling Blue kale. I did the same with Purple Beauty Pepper, because we still have seeds for that variety that are only one year old.

At least a few new varieties make gardening even more interesting than it is on its own merits. We like to watch a plant new to us grow and sometimes thrive, sometimes not, and, even if it grows well and produces abundantly, may not be something we enjoy eating. A little uncertainty keeps the garden from becoming ho-hum. White Candle Gaucho dry beans will make an appearance in next spring’s garden. The fact that these beans dry very quickly is an appealing characteristic. We will see how they turn out for us. Other new to us varieties that we are ordering are Golden Detroit beets, Abenaki Calais Flint corn, Crispino lettuce, Val-aux-Vents shallots, and Feher Ozon heirloom paprika.

The Fedco catalog will provide still more evenings of education and entertainment this winter, as we do what my father always called “winter farming,” preparing for the next season as soon as those frosty fall nights end our present year’s harvest.