

Organic Seed Production Guides Help Fill Knowledge Gap

Production guides for organic carrot, lettuce and beet seed

Lack of available quality and quantity of organic seed is recognized as a weak link in organic systems and has resulted in ongoing exemptions to the National Organic Program seed regulations. While organic seed production is a developing industry and viable opportunity for organic growers, there is a lack of available information and educational support on organic seed production methods. Few Extension programs have the knowledge or outreach capacity to provide organic seed support. Extension programs offer at most only conventional seed production guides, many of which are significantly outdated and lack appropriate recommendations for organic producers.

Organic Seed Alliance (OSA) has released three new publications on the Principles and Practices of Organic Lettuce, Beet, and Carrot Seed Production. The three guides complement OSA's other educational publications filling a gap in information on organic seed production practices. Access to this information will increase the success of organic seed producers, availability of high quality organic seed, and development of a vital organic seed market.

The objective of the guides is to strengthen a weak link in organics by bridging an information gap in the methodology of organic seed production thereby facilitating increased availability of quality organic seed.

In Brief:

Organic seed production is an emerging industry that can provide diversified income to farmers, help organic producers meet NOP seed requirements and develop germplasm appropriate to organic systems. The Organic Seed Alliance has three new organic seed production guides to help farmers produce organic seed.



Organic Seed Alliance
Supporting the ethical development and stewardship of seed
PO Box 772, Port Townsend, WA 98368

Principles and Practices of Organic Beet Seed Production in the Pacific Northwest



This publication made possible through a grant from Organic Farming Research Foundation OFRF

OSA's organic beet seed production guide. Beets are a biennial crop requiring two seasons of cultivation to produce seed.

The western region of the U.S. is a global supplier of dry-seeded vegetable seed and a stronghold of organic vegetable production, which strengthens its potential as a prime region for organic vegetable seed production. Carrots, beets, and lettuce are high demand vegetable seed crops which are well-adapted to production in various climatic zones of California, Oregon, Washington, and Idaho. Availability of crop specific information on organic seed production will increase grower's success and recognition of the western region for organic production of these seed crops.



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PROJECT SUMMARY

John Navazio, Micaela Colley, and Jared Zyskowski led in the authorship of the guides and collaborated on writing on individual topics. Lettuce seed specialist Frank Morton additionally contributed content and extensive tutorial photos for the lettuce seed guide. Each author researched the topics through a variety of means including interviews with farmers, consultations with researchers, reviews of the literature, reviews of past Extension publications, and seed-related technical books. A few older Extension guides were found on beets and lettuce but the information was out of date and oriented toward conventional production. Seed production information is highly privatized and held closely by the seed industry. Through OSA's personal connections to seed industry experts we were able to acquire detailed input on techniques used in seed production.

The content of the guides follows previously published OSA seed guides which include sections on crop history, life cycle, and basic biology; climatic parameters; soil and fertility requirements; planting and cultivation; flowering and pollination; isolation requirements and contamination issues; genetic maintenance and improvement including recommended population sizes and selection criteria; harvest timing and methods; diseases of concern and prevention/management recommendations; and seed conditioning and cleaning. All content is focused on organic practices and recommendations.

The guides are approximately 15 pages long, printed in full color, and contain several photographs. The photos demonstrate field and handling techniques of each crop. Each guide includes a References and Resources section and OSA's Creative Commons agreement which protects and allows free access to the material in the public domain.

These three new production guides funded by OFRF add to OSA's information library for organic producers, which also includes organic production guides for spinach, bean and radish seeds, a guide to conducting organic on-farm flower and vegetable variety trials, and a seed saving guide for gardeners and farmers.



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Visit seedalliance.org for more information.



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Principles and Practices of Organic Carrot Seed Production in the Pacific Northwest



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OSA's organic carrot seed production guide. In the U.S., carrots as a seed crop must be grown in regions which are free of wild carrot, also known as Queen Anne's Lace.



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Principles and Practices of Organic Lettuce Seed Production in the Pacific Northwest



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OSA's organic lettuce seed production guide. Though known as a cool-season crop, lettuce seed production can require a long growing season, and is best accomplished in Mediterranean-type climates.