

# Jules Gone Digging

*“Don’t judge each day by the harvest you reap but by the seeds that you plant” – Robert Louis Stevenson*

Howdy fellow allotmenters! My name is Julia. After the 2018 AGM, at which we talked about providing more ideas and information about sustainable and organic practices and in the process reducing the use of chemicals and encouraging biodiversity and wildlife at our sites, I was inspired to write this article.

Whilst browsing the seed catalogues, I realised that organic, sustainable and responsible gardening is not as simple as growing food without chemicals (here I’m showing my inexperience 😊). I hope the information below gives you some food for thought – it certainly made me question my approach to seed buying:



- ❖ **Open-Pollinated (OP) seeds:** these are created when two of the same varieties are cross-pollinated by wind, birds or insects to create a “true to type” outcome – great for seed saving, reducing the need to spend money next year. Heirloom varieties are all OP.
- ❖ **F1 Hybrid:** Hybrid seeds develop when two OP varieties are cross-pollinated to produce a crop with a ‘benefit’ such as a higher yield. The hybridisation occurs in nature all the time and many enjoy creating their own breeds, however it’s worth considering some implications of commercial F1 Hybrid seeds:
  - **Price:** These seeds tend to be more expensive (e.g. you get fewer seeds in a packet). Companies claim it’s because manual effort is required, however it seems that chemical spraying might be used these days.
  - **Sustainability:** F1 Hybrid seed industrialisation negatively impacts on biodiversity and increases control that corporations gain through our dependency on the most marketed F1 Hybrid seeds.
  - **Supermarket** veg tend to be mostly F1 Hybrid (for its uniformity, storage longevity etc) so saving seeds from the veg bought in the supermarket unlikely to produce good results.
- ❖ **Inbreeders/Outbreeders:** Inbreeder plants (e.g. tomatoes, beans, peas, lettuce) self-pollinate or are pollinated by genetically similar plants to produce similar crops. Great for seed saving! Outbreeders (e.g. sweetcorn, carrots, onions, beets and brassicas) need a wider genetic pool so rely on plants further away to avoid ‘inbreeding depression’, which results in weaker offspring and therefore might do better in a F1 Hybrid form.
- ❖ **GMO seeds:** These cannot be biologically bred in nature and thus differ from hybrids. GMO seeds are patented, and you can’t legally save/grow them without paying to patent owners, which tend to be chemical or pharmaceutical companies...The ethical, ecological and human implications of the GMO crops continue to be debated.
- ❖ **Organic vs. non-Organic:** Organic seeds are saved from plants that were grown to organic standards whilst non-organic seeds are saved from non-organic plants and might’ve been treated with chemicals.
- ❖ **Treated seeds:** Some sort of pesticide, fungicide or preservative — chemical or biological - prior to planting was applied.

All this made me more aware of the seeds that I’m buying and how they’ve been saved so it looks like for a still-novice gardener like me, F1 Hybrid for Outbreeder plants is a way to go for now but I’ll be visiting a seed swap event on the 9<sup>th</sup> February to get some free OP seeds!

If you would like to get some OP seeds or have your own you saved please bring them to our first **‘Seed Swap Bonanza’** (OK, it might be just me there!) on **10<sup>th</sup> February at the New North Road site shop at 10.00-12.00.**

No seeds? No problem! Just come along to say hello and get some free seeds – it would be lovely to meet you 😊. Happy Growing!

by Julia Shmotkina (January 2019)