Ordering from seed and nursery catalogs and web sites gives you hundreds more variety choices than buying off seed racks and from local garden centers. Some recommended varieties are hard to find except through catalogs and web sites.

Each year’s crop of catalogs lists many new, appealing vegetable varieties. Those mouth-watering color pictures make us want to try new things each year. This is fine; who knows what new “winners” we will discover? We do have to use some judgment, however. Before getting carried away, consider our peculiar Puget Sound maritime climate and the limitations it imposes on vegetable selections.

We have a long growing season, that is, the time between the last spring frost and the first fall frost. However, our growing season is comparatively cool. The mean daily temperature tends to be a lower here than in most other regions of the country, so that heat accumulation is also low. There is just not enough heat to mature some heat-loving crops, particularly late maturing varieties.

For example, watermelons, cantaloupe, honeydews, limas, okra and eggplants are often failures in the Puget Sound area. In the case of tomatoes, corn and peppers, we need to be really selective about choosing early-maturing types to be successful. Many large eggplant varieties are not feasible, but the smaller, Asian types are grown with good success on sunny sites.

When choosing melon varieties, look for those described as maturing in less than 80 days. Even with the earliest varieties of melons and other heat-loving crops, you should use cultural techniques to increase heat to be successful.

Seed descriptions on packets, in catalogs and on web sites list days-to-maturity numbers for long-season, heat loving crops. Just about all seed companies test varieties where summers are much warmer than ours. The number of days to maturity for most varieties, therefore, is based on their typical weather conditions, not ours. It’s important to understand that you must increase the number, by about 30 to 40% for it to be accurate here.

Catalogs and web sites often go beyond just listing items for sale and include a wealth of interesting and useful horticultural information. They are often good sources to learn more about plants and gardening. The list below gives the addresses of some seed companies. We are not recommending them and are aware that this is just a small fraction of the number of fine seed companies that exist.
Abundant Life Seeds
PO Box 157
Saginaw, OR 97472-0157
abundantlifeseeds.com
Open-pollinated and heirloom varieties.

W. Atlee Burpee & Co.
300 Park Avenue
Warminster, PA 18974
www.burpee.com

Ed Hume Seeds
PO Box 73160
Puyallup, WA 98373
www.humeseeds.com

Filaree Farm
182 Conconully Hwy
Okanogan, WA 98840
www.filareefarm.com
Seed garlic.

Harris Seeds
355 Paul Road, P.O. Box 24966
Rochester, NY 14624-0966
www.harrisseeds.com

Henry Field's Seed & Nursery Co.
P.O. Box 397
Aurora, IN 47001-0397
www.henryfields.com

Johnny's Selected Seeds
955 Benton Avenue
Winslow, Maine 04901
www.johnnyseeds.com
Varieties for cool growing conditions.

Nichols Garden Nursery
1190 Old Salem Road NE
Albany, Oregon 97321-4580
www.nicholsgardennursery.com

Osborne International Seed Company
2428 Old Hwy 99 South Road
Mount Vernon, WA 98273
www.osborneseed.com

Park Seed Co.
Park Seed Company
1 Parkton Ave.
Greenwood, SC 29647 www.parkseed.com

Pinetree Garden Seeds
PO Box 300
New Gloucester, ME 04260
www.superseeds.com

Raintree Nursery
391 Butts Road
Morton, WA 98356
www.raintreenursery.com
Unusual and recommended fruits, nuts & berries for western WA.

Renee's Garden Seeds
6116 Highway 9
Felton, CA 95018
www.reneesgarden.com
Gourmet vegetable varieties.

Ronniger's Potato Farm
20094 N State Highway 149
Powderhorn, Colorado 81243
www.ronnigers.com
Organic, certified seed potatoes.

Seeds of Change
3209 Richards Lane
Santa Fe, NM 87507
www.seedsofchange.com
Open-pollinated, heirloom varieties.

Stokes Seed Company
PO Box 548
Buffalo, New York 14240-0548
www.stokeseeds.com

Territorial Seed Company
PO Box 158
Cottage Grove, OR 97424-0061
www.territorial-seed.com
Vegetables for our maritime climate.

Thompson & Morgan Seeds
220 Faraday Ave
Jackson, New Jersey 08527
seeds.thompson-morgan.com/us/
Many English varieties of vegetables, which often work well here.

Vermont Bean Seed Co.
334 West Stroud St.
Randolph, WI 53956-1274
www.vermontbean.com