

Gardening with Pelleted Seed



Have you noticed the windowed packets of seeds with brightly colored seeds? These are pelleted seeds, and they can make planting, spacing, and harvesting easier.

What is Pelleted Seed?

Pelleted seeds are small or irregular seeds covered with an inert coating. The coating increases the weight and size of the seed. It is often colored which helps when planting several varieties of seed in one tray, a row in a garden, or a field.

Pelleted seed was originally developed for commercial production with a mechanical seeder. Then, seed companies began producing pelleted seed for vegetables and flowers and seeds are now available at local garden centers and big-box stores.

History of Pelleted Seed

Pelleted seed has been used intermittently since WWI. The improved pelleted seed was introduced for cereal seeds in the 1930s by a British seed company, Germains. In the 1940s, the U.S. used several types of pelleted seed in reforestation studies. The 1960s saw large-scale use of pelletized seed by commercial growers primarily for its ease of use with mechanical planters and new seed coating technologies. In the 1970s, California banned the use of short-handled hoes, increasing the use of pelleted or coated seeds.

Benefits of Pelleted Seed

Pelleted seed has many positive benefits for commercial productions and home gardeners.

- **Protection:** The coating protects seeds from birds, rodents, and a wide range of environmental conditions that often lead to replanting.
- **Fewer seeds are needed:** Since the seed is coated and visible, placement can be more precise and less seed will be used, which saves gardeners money.
- **Less work:** Plants will not need to be thinned.



Photo by Mary Fischer, University of Illinois Extension Horticulture Educator

Commercial Use

For large-scale producers, pelleted seed is easier for specific applications like aerial dropping or mechanical seeders. There are nutrient benefits with increased oxygen availability. The coating allows for pre-inoculation of legume seeds. Since chemicals are applied to the seed and not the whole field, application is safer and there is a lower cost of agricultural chemicals.

One previous obstacle to the widespread adoption of pelleted seed was that the coating would not split open once it was hydrated allowing oxygenated moisture to reach the seed. New levels of coating densities for commercial growers has overcome that issue.

How to use Pelleted Seed

- Keep the growing medium consistently moist, but not soggy, after the seed is sown.
- Use all the pelleted seed in the season it is purchased.



Photo by Mary Fischer, University of Illinois Extension Horticulture Educator

Use the Colors as a Guide

The colored coating allows a home gardener to see the seed as it is planted, the seed spacing, and where it is planted before covering with soil. If a home gardener is starting seed in a tray for transplant later, pelleted seed makes it easier to identify the different types of seed as it is planted.

Make Your Own Seed Tape

- Tear off a length of toilet paper to fit the garden plot.
- Fold it in half lengthwise and cut it into two pieces. Fold each length in half longways and open.
- Following the recommended spacing on the seed packet, place small dots of glue at the appropriate distance to one side of the fold, then add a seed.
- Once the entire length has been planted, fold the other side over the seed side.
- This tape can be wrapped around an empty paper towel roll and labeled for later use.
- When ready to plant, prepare the garden bed, lay the tape on the bed, and cover it to the proper depth as directed on the seed packet.

Source

Meghan Shinn, Horticulture Magazine, March 1, 2020.

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