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—Contributor..... Joslyn McIntyre  
—Contributor email..... joslyn@outsideeyeconsulting.com  
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**Notes from editor (not for publication):**

Really nice story — the seed companies might be a little farther afield than we usually get, but I love how it all comes back to values. Still a whisker too opinionated for news copy — don't be afraid to put everything in front of the readers like bread crumbs and lead them to your point. Finally, I did get a little more economical with language, and I'm afraid the lede was a casualty. I did love the turns of phrase and alliteration but look at how much more quickly your reader gets to the point. ;)

HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1 Cultivating resilience

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

2 Seed companies in New England focus on regional  
3 resilience, non-GMO varieties, and plants that can thrive in  
4 southern Vermont's short growing season

####END SUBHED####

5 TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

6 It's the time of year when our dreams of a better  
7 tomorrow get poured into our gardens.

8 It all starts with the seeds.  
9 “One of the secrets of being a successful gardener is  
10 knowing where to source your seeds and buy your plants. Local  
11 farmers buy seeds that are proven for our neck of the woods  
12 because their livelihood depends on it,” says Jack Manix, owner  
13 of Walker Farm in East Dummerston.

14 “Farmers need plants that will produce for their  
15 customers, so they are willing to spend extra to get the best seeds  
16 available,” he observes.

17 Vermonters have a bevy of local, regional, and New  
18 England seed companies to source from. There are the bigger  
19 favorites: Fedco and Johnny’s in Maine.

20 And closer to us, some specialty and fledgling seed  
21 companies are finding a niche.

22 One such firm, in Montague, Mass., [Ox and Robin](#),  
23 cultivates seeds that grow well in southern Vermont using  
24 environmentally friendly techniques and oxen as the main power  
25 source.

26 “We never use pesticides or herbicides or even  
27 commercial fertilizers,” owner Linda Enerson says. “Our seed  
28 crops grow strong and healthy without [them].”

29 It’s a trend among local seed purveyors: organic, climate-  
30 appropriate, low-impact, and often, heirloom. If you want to  
31 grow vegetables, herbs, and flowers in southern Vermont, look no  
32 further than nearby seed companies specializing in just that.

## 33 **Cultivating for specific** 34 **growing conditions**

35 The practice of home gardening reflects Vermont’s innate  
36 cultural values of resilience, localism, ruralism, and preservation.  
37 A University of Vermont survey found that 61% of all respondents  
38 from Vermont and Maine engaged in home and wild food  
39 procurement activities in 2021 and 2022, and the majority of  
40 those gardened.

41 This is notably higher than the national average; one  
42 recent National Gardening Association study reported that 35%  
43 of families in the United States grow vegetables, fruit, or other  
44 food — and that figure represented a 17% increase over five  
45 years.

46 Vermont has always had a strong agricultural culture,  
47 despite the challenges here in Zone 5b: a very short growing  
48 season, unpredictable weather, rocky and clay-heavy soil, and  
49 more than our fair share of pests and blights. Our season doesn't  
50 officially start until the last risk of frost has passed around  
51 Memorial Day weekend, and it's mostly over by early fall.

52 Hyperlocal varieties have naturally adapted to this  
53 challenging climate, and innovative companies often source  
54 seeds from plants native to other places with similar conditions.

55 In Corinth, Cassie Plummer, owner of [Jig-Bee Flower and](#)  
56 [Seed Company](#), is devoted to cultivating hardy plants that can  
57 thrive in this climate.

58 "I began focusing on seed production so I could steward  
59 varieties that are sometimes hard to find seed for and create new,  
60 unique colors available for gardeners and flower farmers to grow  
61 and save their own seeds," says Plummer, who has been flower  
62 farming for over 10 years.

63 While this is only her second year releasing a seed  
64 catalog, it already offers more than 40 varieties of flowers whose  
65 seeds were all grown and harvested in Vermont. Some of her  
66 favorites include strawflowers, rudbeckia (black-eyed Susan),  
67 coreopsis, feverfew, pincushion flower (scabiosa), snapdragons,  
68 and forget-me-nots.

69 "I'd love to encourage folks to start exploring planting  
70 hardy annuals. The common adage is 'plant your garden on  
71 Memorial Day,' but hardy annuals can be planted in late April or  
72 early May and do really well," Plummer says.

73 These plants "love to establish themselves in the cool soil  
74 of spring, and because Vermont doesn't get so hot, they bloom all  
75 summer long," she adds.

# Preserving agricultural

## heritage

Indigenous New England crops include corn, beans, and squash, known as “the Three Sisters” because each improves the conditions for the others. The Abenaki people historically grew these companion plants, along with sunflowers, sunchokes, ground cherries, and tobacco.

Subsistence crops — including potatoes, turnips, asparagus, and apples — introduced by the colonists have also become staples of Vermont gardens.

Plenty of other foods have fallen out of fashion over the years, particularly those not supported by the bigger seed companies. Salsify, rutabaga, and sunchokes — all root vegetables — used to be common on dinner tables.

Some Vermont seed companies now maintain a focus on preserving rare, heirloom, and regionally important varieties of fruits and vegetables. [High Mowing Organic Seeds](#), based in Wolcott, has been around for two decades and offers over 600 varieties of seeds, the majority of which are certified organic and are free from genetic modifications (non-GMO).

The firm specializes in varieties adapted to Vermont’s soils and microclimates, including some of these harder-to-find heritage varieties.

Its Jacob’s Cattle dry bean is an heirloom with indigenous roots, and Roy’s Calais Flint Corn is an Abenaki variety of corn rescued from near-extinction in 1996 by the seed company’s founder, Tom Stearns.

High Mowing’s dedication to preserving Vermont’s heritage of growing is why local gardening experts like Sarah Rosow, farm-to-school coordinator at Guilford Central School, often buy from this company.

“Not only do I love their seeds, but I have a special place in my heart for High Mowing because they are a Vermont company and particularly generous when it comes to donating

110 seeds for school garden programs,” Rosow says. “Every year they  
111 send us 100 seed packets. I get so excited when the package  
112 arrives.”

## 113 **Supporting the local economy** 114 **(even in outer space)**

115 Buying from closer-to-home companies reduces  
116 dependence on long supply chains, enabling you to support the  
117 local economy. Supporters call it a direct, tangible way to push  
118 back against the consolidation of the global seed supply by  
119 multinational corporations — and, as a bonus, you can often  
120 speak directly with the growers.

121 [Johnny’s Selected Seeds](#), founded in 1973 by Rob  
122 Johnston Jr. during the back-to-the-land movement, is now a fully  
123 employee-owned company based in Winslow, Maine. Johnny’s  
124 doesn’t sell genetically engineered seeds and instead has long  
125 been known for using traditional methods to create hybrid seeds  
126 — a process that can take years.

127 The company has a reputation for high quality and high  
128 integrity, and is big enough to have a quality control department  
129 — but still a small-enough company to care deeply about its  
130 original and lasting mission to “help families and friends to feed  
131 one another.”

132 Fun fact: In 2015, astronauts on the International Space  
133 Station grew and ate Johnny’s “Outredgeous” romaine lettuce in  
134 space (where, presumably, there aren’t a lot of local seed  
135 companies).

136 Longtime Guilford gardener Anne Rider says, “I tend to  
137 get my seeds from Johnny’s, my bulbs from Van Engelen [in  
138 Connecticut], and my starts from Tadj Shrek at Up the Road Farm  
139 in Guilford.” For her starts, Rider buys most of her seeds from  
140 High Mowing and Johnny’s.

## 141 **Staying away from GMO**

142 While the big multinational agricultural conglomerates  
143 rule U.S. crops with their genetically engineered varieties of corn  
144 and soybeans, family-owned operations in and around Vermont  
145 uphold a different philosophy: small-scale, non-GMO seed  
146 diversity. Better for the land, better for the local economy, better  
147 for ecology.

148 Up in St. Johnsbury, [Le Jardin du Gourmet](#) is a third-  
149 generation family-owned business selling strictly non-GMO seeds  
150 for over five decades. This Northeast Kingdom mail-order seed  
151 company is known for its affordable sample packets (still 55  
152 cents) and specialty crops like fraise des bois (wild French  
153 strawberry plants) and saltwort (an edible coastal plant you can  
154 use in salads or as a side dish).

155 [Vermont Wildflower Farm](#), in Hinesburg, has been  
156 selling non-GMO-only flower seeds since 1981. The family-  
157 owned business has grown into one of the largest seed  
158 companies in the country, but its ethos stands firm: “100% pure  
159 seed (no fillers ever), open-pollinated, GMO and chemical free,  
160 just as nature intended!”

161 The company cultivates more than 354 species, offering  
162 highly specific mixes, including a Deer Resistant Wildflower Seed  
163 Mix and a Native Northeastern Mix.

## 164 **Trying something new**

165 People who found seed companies are innovators at  
166 heart, and smaller local seed companies often experiment with  
167 new crops that aren't in the usual lineup.

168 At Ox and Robin, Enerson experiments with seeds that  
169 are adaptable to the hilltown climate — like Criolla Sella  
170 peppers, which were developed in the Andean mountains and  
171 produce an early, prolific hot pepper.

172 “They start producing bright yellow medium hot peppers  
173 80 days after transplanting and keep pumping them out until the  
174 season’s end,” Enerson says.

175 “When the first big frost hit last fall, I pulled the plants  
176 out of the ground and hung them in my unheated barn,” she  
177 continues. “I’m still picking the dried peppers off those plants and  
178 seasoning my dinners with them. That variety is a real  
179 powerhouse!”

180 Other seed experiments she has run include the North  
181 Carolina Heirloom Pickling Cucumber, the Patisson Panache  
182 Jaune et Verte summer squash, and Fagiolini dell’occhio yardlong  
183 beans.

184 Enerson, who illustrates her own seed packs with original  
185 watercolors and collage, says, “I’m going to grow some natural  
186 dye plants this year, such as indigo, weld, madder, and dyer’s  
187 chamomile, so I’m excited about that.”

## 188 **Finding seeds that tell a good** 189 **story**

190 Some seeds offer a lot more than just nutrition.  
191 [Homecoming Seeds](#) in Northfield, Vermont sells seeds for all of  
192 24 plants, but virtually every seed it sells has a good backstory.

193 The company’s bioregionally adapted open-pollinated  
194 vegetable, flower, and herb seeds include Josh Toombs Purple  
195 Podded Pea (with roots in Ireland) and the Sibirskiy Knyaz  
196 (Siberian prince) pepper (“a Russian sweet pepper developed for  
197 shorter seasons by a research station in Western Siberia”).

198 That seed, along with two varieties of bush bean  
199 (Keygold and Purpiat) and Maria Amazilitei’s Giant Red tomato,  
200 were all passed down to owner Charlie Watt from his mentor,  
201 John Austin. The Green Egg Yolk tomato and Noir de Pardailhan  
202 turnip, rare varieties you probably won’t find elsewhere, were  
203 introduced to Watt by farming friends.

204 Watt plants most of his seeds on his family's Flytree Farm  
205 for a continuous cycle of improvement, selecting for the toughest  
206 traits and improving the resilience of the seeds. This year, he's  
207 excited about the new onion crop he stored overwinter in a root  
208 cellar.

209 "Not only has the onion proved to be an exceptionally  
210 tasty and fantastic storage onion, but it holds a special place in  
211 Homecoming Seeds' story because it was the first seed crop we  
212 planted as a family," he says.

213 "My daughter, wife, and parents all seeded these  
214 together in a ceremonial planting to initiate Homecoming Seeds.  
215 It's also a variety shared from Ireland, which holds special  
216 meaning to our family; the name Buan means 'long lasting' in  
217 Gaelic."

218 It's an apt meaning, as seeds have long been a symbol of  
219 human resilience, sovereignty, and longevity.

220 "We hope that planting seeds, gardening, and eating  
221 these foods can help you feel more connected and grounded in  
222 this crazy world," says Watt. "And, of course, we encourage  
223 everyone to share the delicious food you make with your friends,  
224 family, and neighbors."

225 "Getting outside, growing plants is a great way to get  
226 some time moving around in nature, which is such a great  
227 antidote to sitting all day staring at our screens," Ox and Robin's  
228 Enerson says.

229 "You don't need pesticides, herbicides, bags of soil mix  
230 or fertilizer," she adds. "Homemade compost, a few seeds,  
231 minimal tools, and some water are all you need to get your  
232 garden growing."

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LOGLINE (SOCIAL MEDIA):

####BEGIN LOGLINE####

237

In 2025, family-owned seed companies in southern

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Vermont, such as Walker Farm, High Mowing Organic Seeds,

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Johnny's Selected Seeds, and Vermont Wildflower Farm, cultivate

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heirloom varieties and promote sustainable, non-GMO practices

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while preserving regional agricultural heritage and fostering local

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diversity.

####END LOGLINE####