

Pelleted seeds: pros & cons



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Question: When purchasing my seeds for this year's garden, I noticed many more pelleted seeds are available. What are the advantages and the disadvantages of using pelleted seeds?

Answer: Pelleted seeds (sometimes called coated seeds) were originally designed for commercial production. The uniform size of pelleted seeds works well when using a mechanical seeder.

However, pelleted seeds have been gaining popularity with home gardeners in recent years and are easy to find at local garden centers.

So what exactly are they? Pelleted seeds are ordinary seeds that have been coated with some type of inert material such as clay, perlite and FDA-approved food coloring. Some pelleted seeds are coated with fungicide, and less commonly, insecticide.

There are advantages and disadvantages to using pelleted seed.

ADVANTAGES

Pelleted seeds are much easier to handle than traditional seeds because the coating makes them less likely to stick together. Also, the coating on the seeds makes them larger and between 10-40 times heavier than traditional seeds.

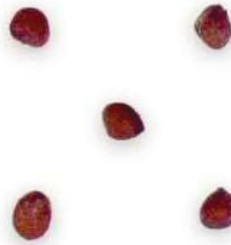
So, they aren't going to blow away



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Pelleted with a melting coating that dissolves when wetted.

Untreated

Pelleted seeds are tumbled in a pan while inert powders like diatomaceous earth and binders form around the seed, providing a uniform shape.



in the wind, and if you drop any, they will be easily found. And as an added bonus, the coating protects seeds from birds and rodents.

Pelleted seeds are great for precise planting. Since the seeds are coated, they can be spaced out evenly and planted at a consistent depth. This is especially useful for very small seeds that can be difficult to space out and plant evenly. Just think about how difficult it was the last time you planted seeds like carrots or petunias. Pelleted seeds make the minuscule traditional seeds easier to plant.

Pelleted seeds have a higher germination rate than traditional seeds. Research indicates that germination may be increased by 50% in some cases. This is because the coating on the seeds helps to protect them from the elements and pests which can damage or destroy traditional seeds.

Also, the coating on the seeds helps to keep them moist which is necessary for germination.

Pelleted seeds also reduce waste. When planting traditional seeds, it is common to over plant in order to ensure that enough seeds germinate. And then once the seeds germinate, you will need to thin some of them.

However, with pelleted seeds, you can plant exactly the number of seeds you need which reduces waste and saves money.

DISADVANTAGES

Pelleted seeds are more expensive than traditional seeds. Pelleted seeds are also limited in variety. While more and more types of seeds are being pelleted each year, there are still many types of seeds

Radish seeds in a packet.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MARY FISCHER/
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS EXTENSION

Pelleted



that are not available in pelleted form.

If you are looking for a specific type of seed, you may not be able to find it in a pelleted form.

Pelleted seeds have a shorter shelf life than traditional seeds. This is because the coating on the seeds can break down over time, which can reduce the rate of germination.

You need to use the pelleted seeds in the year they are purchased. If you are planning to store seeds for a long

period of time, traditional seeds may be a better option.

Pelleted seeds have limited organic options. Many of the coatings used on pelleted seeds are not organic which can be a concern for many home gardeners.

Ultimately, the decision to use pelleted seeds or traditional seeds will depend on your individual needs and preferences. If you are looking for an easy and precise way to plant seeds and are willing to pay a little extra, pelleted seeds may be the way to go.

However, if you are on a tight budget, looking for a specific type of seeds, or concerned about the environmental impact of the coatings used on pelleted seeds, traditional seeds may be a better option.

Do you have a gardening or insect question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu or 541-672-4461 or visit 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg. Douglas County Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who help the Oregon State University Extension Service serve the people of Douglas County.

