

SEED DREAMS – LOCAL SEED ADAPTED TO LOCAL CONDITIONS

By Deborah Schumacher, Food Co-op Staff Writer (2005)

Buying local seeds just makes good sense. One thing I sometimes forget in my enthusiasm for seeds is to look for varieties that are suited to our Pacific Northwest climate. I'm often attracted to seeds and plants with interesting names or that have an interesting history, pretty much anything that begins with "Grandma's" or "Grandpa's." I'm learning, though, to pay attention to whether the plant will do well in a cooler climate and to look for warm-season plant seeds that will ripen before our short and sweet summer comes to an end. To that end, choosing a local seed source like Seed Dreams helps us to choose varieties that are suitable to our Olympic Peninsula and our Port Townsend micro-climate.

The Idea of Place

I talked briefly with Tessa Gowans, our local seed producer at Seed Dreams, to find out a little bit about her operation. After Abundant Life separated and changed names, she and a partner continued with local seed production under Independent Seed, but because "it's difficult to make a living producing and selling seed, more difficult even than making a living as a farmer these days," her partner left the operation. Tessa continues the adventure with Seed Dreams. She continues because, she believes, we "still need a local resource. It feels like something really important, to have a seed resource for this place."

The idea of *place* is central to her work. The seeds that Tessa grows and sells to our community are seeds for the plants that will grow well in this area, "this little niche" that is not exactly like any other place in the world. There's no point, she observes, trying to grow seed that's adapted to a California climate or a Minnesota climate, when you're going to plant the seed in Port Townsend, Washington soil and ask it to grow in a cool and dampish maritime climate.

Her focus is on roots (beets, carrots, leeks), brassicas, lettuce, chard, and spinach. There are also some beans that grow well here, lots of peas, a few squash, and some corn and tomato varieties that grow well here as well. Tessa also partners with local growers in our area like Tinker at Thimbleberry Farm, Scott at Nash's in Sequim, and Corona Farms to produce her seed.

Get Out There and Get Planted

Tessa encourages us to first "think about what grows good in your garden," and to perhaps try saving our own seed. She learned to save seed from her grandmother and grew up with the idea that saving seed was just a natural thing to do—"that's the way to garden." She's been at it for 50 years now and has a wealth of knowledge that is a precious local resource for those of us that garden or farm here.

She described to me the great fun she had last year with the 12 varieties of cucumber she planted in a bed last year—she observed each plant, watched some succeed and some not do so well, and then shared the abundance with friends. She says the best sweet corn to

grow in our area is True Platinum (“big ears, sweet, really good”) and Luther Hill (“definitely the sweetest, but really small”). For tomatoes, Slava and Stupice are still the best.

The Food Co-op is Tessa Gowans only venue, other than friends, and supporting our local seed grower will assure the continuance of this precious resource. Tessa’s aims are very altruistic: “I’m doing it for the seeds—they want to go out there and get planted!