



**Tom Johns, Territorial Seed Company,
Cottage Grove, Oregon**

Thirty-five years old and still growing, Territorial Seed Company sells seeds and transplants to gardeners throughout the United States, with particular attention to those in the maritime northwest. In fact the need for seeds suited to that specific climate is what gave the company its start. In 1979 owner and founder Steve Solomon sought out varieties that did well in England because, he reasoned, those varieties would also flourish in the maritime northwest, where Territorial Seed is situated. This focus continues into the present. Current owners Tom and Julie Johns look for the hardiest vegetable varieties on the planet—those that perform well in Germany, Switzerland, and other northern countries. And then they test them. From its inception the company has maintained an extensive trial grounds, where an in-season staff of about 55 grows and evaluates thousands of varieties for vigor and taste.



Territorial Seed Company owners Tom and Julie Johns grow seed in an Oregon valley.

Territorial Seed offers a few items that you may have difficulty finding elsewhere, including its winter gardening blends: seed that will keep you eating fresh cauliflower, cabbage, and broccoli from September to March. A year-round blend of four sprouting broccoli varieties will produce a continuous nine-month harvest of mini broccoli heads from a single sowing in regions where the climate permits winter growing. With 75 acres of certified organic land in London Springs, Oregon, Territorial is its own largest seed supplier. This enables the company to produce unique strains of vegetables that thrive where summers are cool and winters mild, such as ‘Thompson’ and ‘Umpqua’ open-pollinated broccoli, and earlier fruiting ‘Brandywine’ tomatoes.

Tom and Julie Johns bought the company in 1985, when it was a relatively young startup. Raised by entrepreneurs and emboldened by the economic recession of the early 1980s, the



The Staff at Territorial Seed Company

young couple was determined not to be wholly dependent on the local economy. Tom was selling ads at the local newspaper and Julie was an accountant at Cottage Grove Hospital when they spotted an ad: “... mail order seed company in Lorane for sale.” Now, nearly 30 years later, they’re still happy with their decision to buy the company because “it’s still fun.”

Two years ago son Jacob began working at the company. With a degree in Management Information Systems, and a

childhood spent working on the farm, he’s learning what it takes to become a good direct marketer. Despite hefty online sales “we are still a mail-order company,” says Tom. Gardeners buy seed because they read the enticing descriptions in the paper catalog.

Compost is key. “For plants to travel well they need robust roots,” Tom states. Having followed the research of Elaine Ingham of Oregon State University, he believes heartily in using compost and compost tea to produce vigorous plants. Besides growing for the farm, Territorial Seed raises tens of thousands of transplants for sale to customers. A vermicomposting operation yields plentiful worm castings for their organic soil mix, and compost tea sprays keep transplants strong.

“We are soil farmers first,” he adds. Growing tilth with buckwheat, capturing nitrogen with legumes, and feeding the soil critters with a variety of other cover crops keeps the soil in top condition. Plants on the farm are so healthy, in fact, that spraying for pests is rarely necessary.

Tom Johns’ Tips for Gardeners

- It does not really start with the seed; it starts with the soil.
- Feed the soil critters. Keep them eating and pooping, eating and pooping.
- Start with good, healthy transplants, whether you start them yourself or buy them.

