



## Understanding Vegetable Terms

Contact: Diane Relf, Extension Specialist, Environmental Horticulture  
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The seed catalogs have been arriving steadily and you've been making some BIG plans for the garden. However, the catalogs may use terms that you are not familiar with. To help you get through the seed catalogs here are some explanations.

A garden catalog ad may read: "The flavor of this new gynoecious, parthenocarpic slicing cucumber is mild and free of bitterness. It is resistant to mosaic virus and scab."; or "this hybrid tomato grows as a determinate plant. It is jointless for easy picking and VF resistant."

This ad puts forth some critically important vegetable characteristics in a very succinct form. If you don't know what the terms mean, the information is useless. Following is a list of some vegetable terms commonly found in garden catalogs:

- Gynoecious - having only female flowers on the plant. This term is only used on those plants which have separate male and female flowers. It is not uncommon to also have a few male blossoms due to genetics and environment, but the preponderance of flowers on a gynoecious plant are female and produce fruit if pollinated.
- Parthenocarpic - setting fruit without the need for pollination. Without the contribution of pollen, seeds within the female fruit do not develop.
- Slicing - type of cucumber intended for fresh use as contrasted with pickling types. Slicers are long, the length is four to five times the diameter. Most popular varieties are dark green colored.
- Non-bitter - refers to the absence of cucurbitacin, the bitter compound which is present throughout the vegetative parts of most cucumber varieties. Only under some stressful growing conditions do bitter plants produce bitter fruit. Non-bitter plants are damaged less by cucumber beetles.
- Resistance to disease - when the plant is immune, the plant or variety shows no effects of the disease organism. However, the term "resistant" is used when a plant is able to grow better or show less severe symptoms of a disease than other plants. A plant may be either resistant or immune to one race of an organism, like the fungus *Fusarium oxysporum* race 1, but not resistant or immune to other *Fusarium oxysporum* races.
- Mosaic - a virus-caused disease which usually shows symptoms of misshapen fruit, yellow mottled leaves, stunted plant size and off-taste or bitter fruit of cucumbers.
- Scab - a fungus disease on cucurbits which causes leaf spots that eventually leave small ragged holes and sunken, olive-green velvety spots that crack the fruit.
- Hybrid - refers to the offspring of two parents, each of which is stable and predictable in its own characteristics.

For most hybrid crops, the plant breeder can combine plant traits so the progeny will yield earlier, usually with more uniformity, vigor, production, and disease resistance.

- Determinate - usually refers to a tomato variety in which the main stem finally produces a terminal flower cluster and stops vertical growth. The plant is short, often stable without staking when compared to an indeterminate tomato which grows until frost stops it. The determinate plant produces tomato clusters at each node and ripening is early and concentrated.
- Jointless - indicates the tomato can be pulled off the plant leaving the stem behind. The pedicel or stem does not form an abscission layer an inch or two above the fruit and therefore detaches at the tomato.
- VFN&T - are symbols for the soil-borne organisms to which a tomato variety is resistant. V & F stand for Verticillium and Fusarium which are fungus organisms that cause wilting of tomato plants and other crops. N stands for Nematodes which are microscopic roundworms which can feed on plant roots. In large enough numbers, they can stunt the roots of infected plants, causing wilt and death. T represents Tobacco Mosaic Virus which deforms the leaves and stunts the plant. TMV is often brought into the garden by smokers (it is often present in tobacco products) and spread by mechanically by handling the plants. Since there is no chemical control, it is a serious problem once a garden is infected. Stated with the name of a tomato variety, each letter indicates some degree of resistance of that tomato line to that particular problem.
- Open-pollinated - Plants that have been pollinated naturally by wind, insects, or by normal plant movement necessary to fertilize the flowers and later to produce fruits. Open-pollinated plants are not manipulated by man to achieve pollination.

(Adapted by Jennifer Shuster, Extension Technician, Consumer Horticulture, Virginia Tech, from information supplied by Roger Kline, Department of Vegetable Crops, Cornell University, and published in Greenflash, CES, Massachusetts.)

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