Selecting Seed-Bearing Plants

Learn how to observe all your plants throughout their life cycle to choose the best breeders, mark your seed-bearing plants in the field, and move beyond the "biggest vegetable" trap to select vigorous and adapted seeds.



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Selecting means choosing the future of your garden

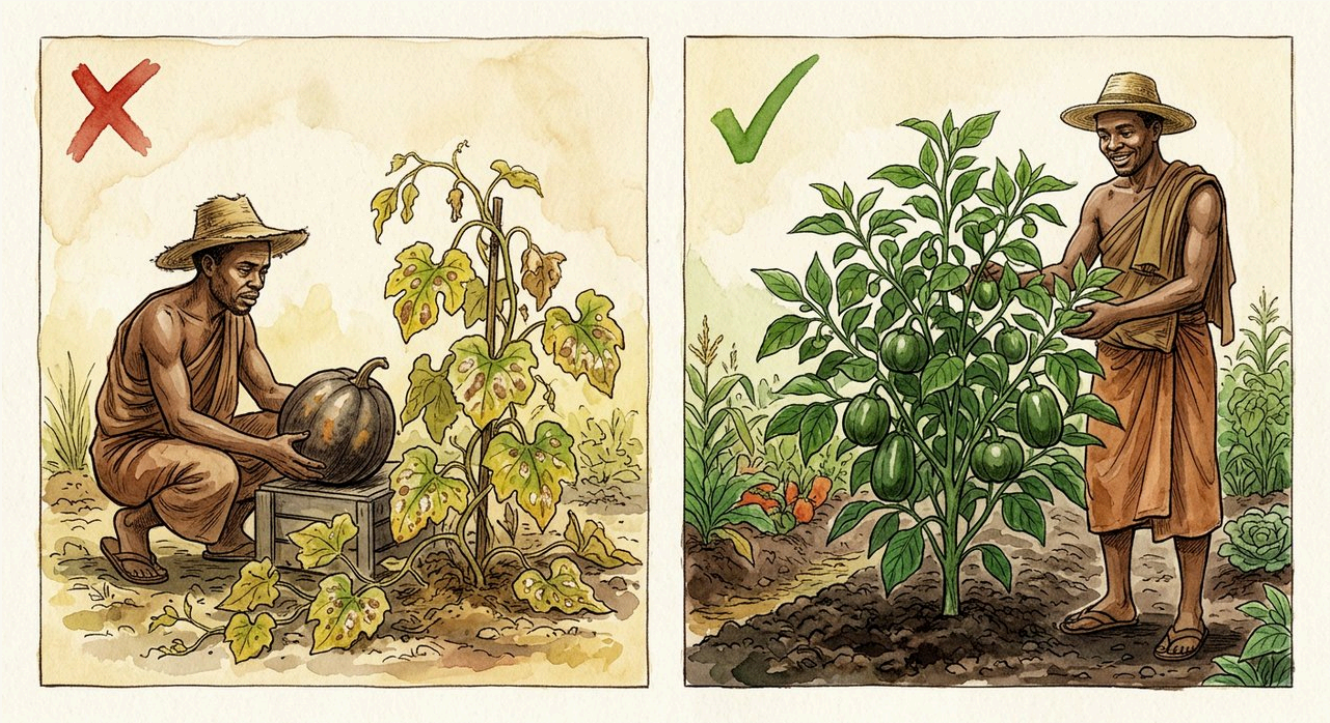
When you harvest a seed, you are choosing the children of your garden for next year!

By choosing the best plants, you adapt your crops to your soil, your climate, and your tastes.

This is called **farmer selection**.

It makes your crops stronger and more self-sufficient year after year!

The Classic Trap: Only Looking at the Fruit



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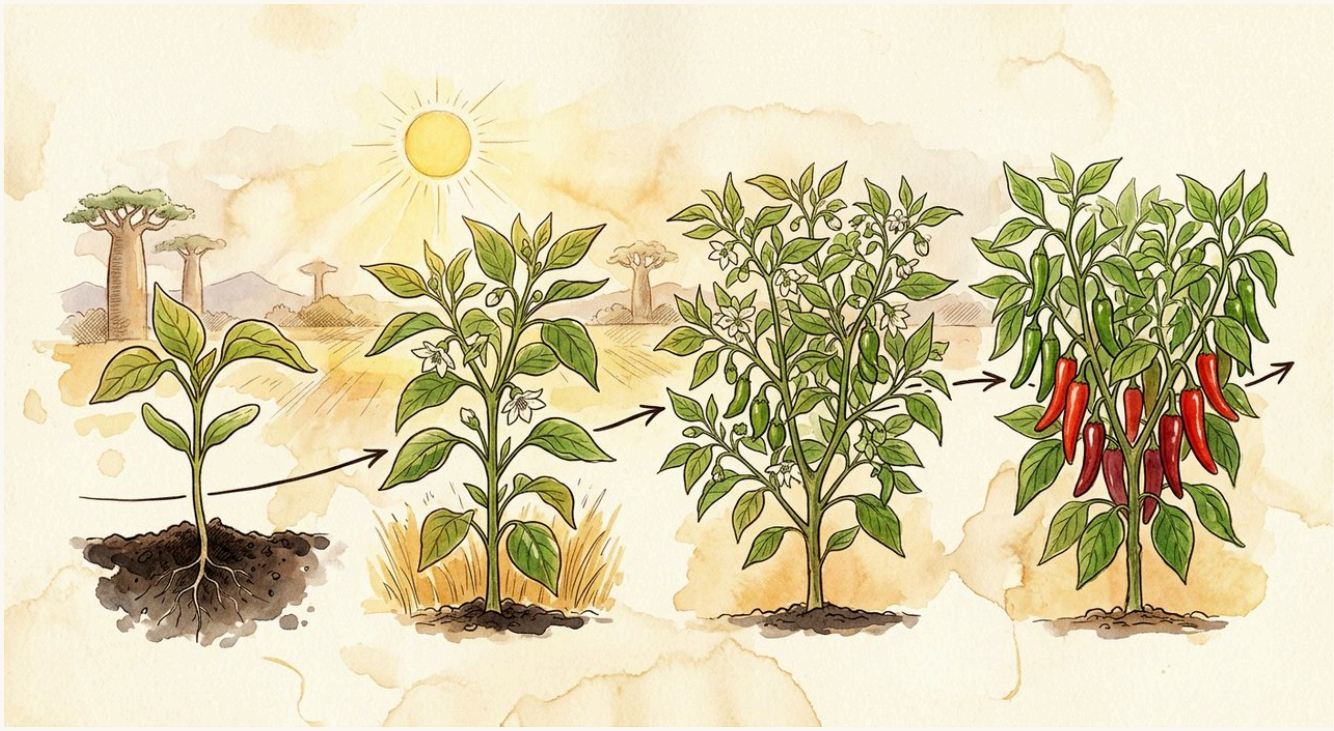
Many market gardeners make this mistake:

They wait for the harvest and save seeds from the largest vegetable found in the crate.

This is a trap!

A large fruit can come from a fragile plant, one that fell ill right after or was excessively watered.

The seed inherits the entire behavior of the plant, not just the shape of the fruit!



First Golden Rule: Observe the Plant from Start to Finish

Good selection begins in the nursery and continues until full maturity!

Observe your plants at each stage of their life:

1. Which seed germinated first with vigor?
2. Which plant withstood the scorching sun well without wilting?
3. Which plant was not attacked by foliage diseases?

Choosing Your Criteria: Health First



Choosing Your Criteria: Health First

The first absolute criterion is health!

Never save seeds from a **diseased**, **stunted**, or **suspiciously spotted** plant.

Viruses and fungi can reside in the seed and infect your entire next crop.

Choose only **healthy**, **vigorous**, and **upright** plants!

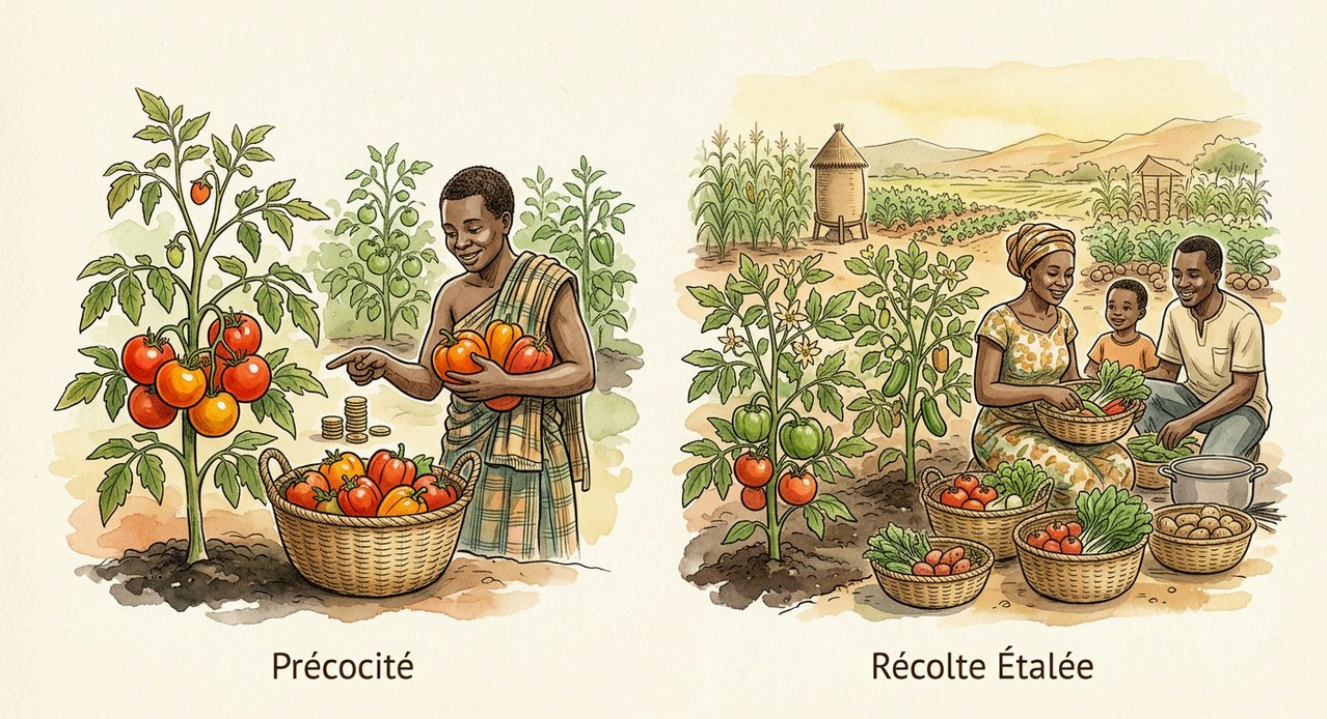
Choosing Your Criteria: Heat and Drought Resistance



Choosing Your Criteria: Heat and Drought Resistance

Under the scorching sun and in the dry season:

- Observe your beds during the hottest hours of the day (around 1 PM or 2 PM).
- Some plants completely give up and wilt.
- Others remain upright and keep their leaves firm: these are your champions of resistance!



Earliness or Extended Harvest: What Do You Want?

Depending on your market or family needs, you can choose what matters most:

- **Earliness**: You identify the first plant that yields ripe vegetables to sell at the best price before everyone else.
- **Productivity**: You choose the plant that produces regularly over a long period.

Make sure to note what you are looking for from the start!



Taste, Shape, and Firmness: Taste Before You Harvest!

For fruit vegetables (tomatoes, watermelons, cucumbers):

Always taste at least one fruit from the plant you want to keep!

Is it sweet? Does it taste good? Is the skin firm enough to withstand transport?

If a fruit is bitter or mealy, absolutely do not save its seeds, even if the plant is magnificent!

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Immediately Mark Selected Plants



Immediately Mark Selected Plants

As soon as you've identified an exceptional plant, mark it without delay!

- Tie a piece of cloth or a brightly colored ribbon to the main stem.
- Plant a clearly visible stake at its base.

Without marking, you or a worker will instinctively harvest the fruit to eat or sell it!



Preventing Family and Workers from Harvesting

In a shared plot or with workers:

Clearly explain the meaning of the red ribbon:

"This plant with the red ribbon is our seed stock for next year. Absolutely no harvesting its fruits!"

A ribbon protects months of work from unintentional harvesting.



Making a simple plan in a notebook

Rain, sun, and wind can discolor or dislodge a ribbon.

To be sure not to lose anything:

- Draw the plan of your beds in a simple notebook.
- Note where your seed parents are located (for example: "Bed 3, stake 5: Resistant local tomato").

This plan stays safe at home!

Warning: The seed plant lives much longer!



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To eat a lettuce or a cucumber, a few weeks are enough.

But to produce living and mature seeds, the plant needs much more time!

A lettuce is eaten after 2 months, but its seeds require 5 to 6 months.

The seed plant will occupy the bed long after the end of ordinary harvests!

Group Seed-Bearing Plants in a Dedicated Area



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To avoid blocking an entire bed that you need for replanting:

- When possible, reserve a square or an end of your plot to group your seed-bearing plants.
- You will be able to continue watering and monitoring your seeds without disturbing the rest of your market garden!

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Special Case: When NOT to Select?



Special Case: When NOT to Select?

Sometimes, it is crucial not to perform severe selection:

1. **Rare or endangered variety**: If you only have 5 or 6 plants of an heirloom variety, keep ALL healthy plants to save the variety!
2. **Need for high diversity**: Mixing seeds from different plants creates a "reservoir" capable of withstanding unforeseen events.

Too much culling on a small group weakens the variety.



Maintaining a Sufficient Population

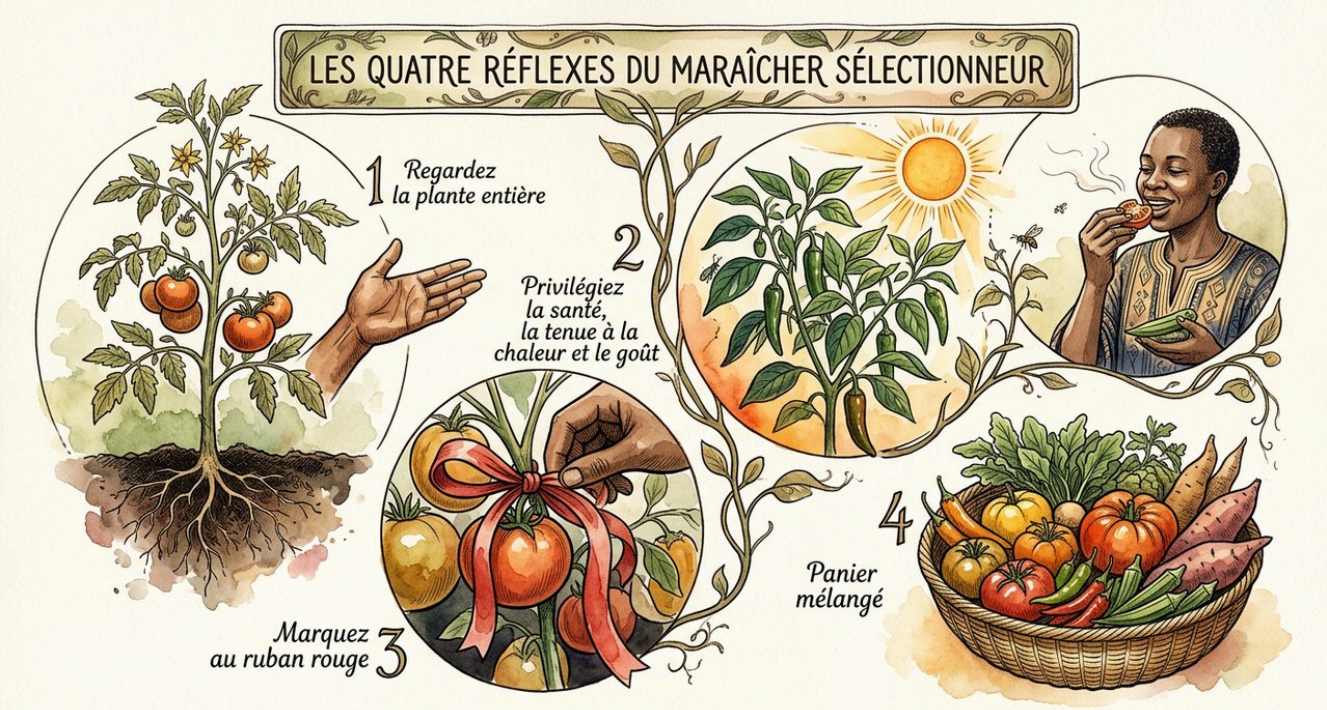
To keep your seeds vigorous year after year:

Never harvest seeds from a single plant!

Harvest seeds from several different healthy plants (at least 5 to 10 for tomatoes or peppers, 30 to 50 for corn or cabbage).

Mixing their seeds prevents what is known as **inbreeding** (the depletion of the family).

The 4 Reflexes of the Market Gardener Breeder



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To succeed in your selection each season:

1. **Look at the entire plant**, not just the fruit size.
2. **Prioritize health**, heat tolerance, and taste.
3. **Mark with ribbon** as soon as the champion is spotted.
4. **Harvest from several healthy plants** to maintain the vigor of the variety!

Congratulations! You are the creator of your own seeds



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Bravo! You now know how to choose your best seeds:

✅ You no longer fall into the trap of the giant fruit on a diseased plant

✅ You know how to spot plants that brave heat and diseases

✅ Your seed parents are marked, protected, and monitored over time

Next module: Isolation techniques to avoid undesirable cross-pollination!