



Although its midsummer and warm, the Rocky Mountains still have snow glazed atop their slopes, and here, in Broomfield, Colorado, their presence dominates and captures every last heart and eye. The alpine beauty is virtually impossible to ignore, but we try, if but momentarily, to focus on what we've traveled here to see — things vastly smaller but no less important. We've come to the Rockies to learn about seeds.

Botanical Interests



*"All the flowers of tomorrow are in
the seeds of today."*

Ralph Waldo Emerson



Botanical Interests is a seed company, owned and operated by Curtis Jones and his wife Judy. To say that the business is a “family business” is to run into a host of clichés — but darn it if that isn’t exactly what it is. A “family” spirit pours out of every corner of their seed-packing warehouse and offices. The 22 on-site employees have adorned stairwells with drawings sketched by their children. The company refrigerator is splattered with goofy photos. There’s a Foosball table in an “end-tag” room where the Jones’ daughter, the ebullient and wise, Sophie, will take a dollar from you for every goal she scores. There are honest and generous smiles here. And for good reason.

Business at Botanical Interests is good and keeps getting better. What began in a spare bedroom and garage 15 years ago has blossomed into a robust, multi-state enterprise. “But we’re going to stay small,” says Curtis at a clip. “We’re more efficient this way. We can control quality better. And, ‘cause, actually, it’s more fun when it’s this way.” Curtis’ enthusiastic banter is both infectious and inspiring.



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“We offer 500 hundred different lines of seed,” he says while showing us rows of boxes filled with empty seed packets. The packets are known for their romantically illustrated covers, what’s less known though, and ingenious to boot, is that inside each packet is printed a very in-depth instruction guide. Most of what you’d need to know about, say, the shelling peas you’ve just bought, will be detailed inside the packet. This addition alone makes Botanical Interests products superior.

But what gets Curtis most excited are the seeds. “We sell the finest seed there is. We’re very proud of that. If seed comes in that’s beneath our standard we don’t use it. I mean, really, we do not use it. We could make an extra nickel by selling inferior stuff





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but we'd rather sell the best seeds out there. That's the only way that makes sense to us."

Part of what makes Curtis' statements believable is seeing a table of seedlings being grown under grow-lights right in the warehouse. "We grow plants from extra seeds or test seeds and then everybody takes them home to their gardens. We want all of our employees to garden. They need to love our product, too."

Yes, the employees all garden, but the bosses garden more.

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Judy's in charge of these grounds. Sunny and smart, she's responsible for turning the inventory and accounting practices of the fledgling Botanical Interests into the efficient operation it is currently. But today she's weeding. Tomorrow is the annual company picnic (a company picnic in the boss's back yard. Can it get more "family" than that?) and she needs to get the garden into ship-shape order. Her help for the afternoon is a woman from the marketing division, the woman's daughter, and a family friend. Together they bucket-up loads of weeds and carry them off to the compost piles. There's something of a barn-raising feel to it. So much so that we suddenly find ourselves weeding alongside them. "Can't help yourself, can you?" Judy notes with a wide grin.

"So, what're some of your favorites?" Judy asks, always keen to add something new and interesting to what they offer. But we turn the question around. "Me?" she responds, "I love everything. I love Italian kale. That is so good. And big-seeded



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mache' — so easy, so good to eat. I love those big poppies over there." She's referring to a stand of deep purple bread-seed poppies (Lauren's Grape), a variety the company will begin offering next spring. "I just love plants," she says while blowing a loose wisp of hair out of her eyes, "I just love gardening."

The benefits of growing a garden from seeds are many. It's penny-wise. It's good for ecological and agricultural diversity. It's an easy way of maintaining heirloom varieties of flowers and vegetables. And, well, when it comes right down to it, it's fun.

Open up a packet of Botanical Interest seeds, put them in the ground and sprinkle them with water. Do this and you will have joined a unique family of gardeners — a family that grows bigger by the day.

