

# Essentials

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**Friday Magazine**  
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Your weekly guide to eating, health, sustainable living and home | **GARDENING EDITION**

## What's not to like about gardening?

The snow has kept gardeners out of the dirt, but soon shovels will be turning soil. In the meantime, our special issue on gardening will give you everything you need to know to get started with information on seed starting and making a preemptive — but organic — strike against weeds.

We will continue to offer Colorado-specific information for the entire season. Each section of Essentials will include written information on what you need to do each week in your garden with a video online at [www.dailycamera.com](http://www.dailycamera.com) by gardening columnist Carol O'Meara of Colorado State University Extension Service. If you don't know when to plant broccoli, not to worry, information on planting will appear the week before the crop needs to go in the ground. The first three segments deal with seed starting. Just looking at those seed packet will have you tomato dreaming.

As the year progresses and the harvest begins, the Culinary School of the Rockies how-to video will switch to seasonal foods. Learn how to keep insects off your tomatoes on Wednesday and how to prepare them on Thursday. The tomatoes, not the insects.

Happy gardening!

— Essentials Editor  
Cindy Sutter

**FIT!**



Growing community with horticulture therapy, Page 3B

Tracy Woodall puts together a large seed order at Botanical Interests in Broomfield.



## Broomfield seed company takes advantage of garden boom

# Growth industry

By Cindy Sutter  
Camera Staff Writer

Now here's a requisite you won't find many places: a company that starts garden seeds for its workers.

But at the Broomfield seed company, Botanical Interests, it's a natural outgrowth, so to speak, of the business.

"We want all our employees to feel part of the operation," says Curtis Jones, who owns the 15-year-old company with his wife, Judy Seaborn.

The company, which the couple started in their garage, saw a 20 percent jump in business last year to sales of more than 6 million seed packets and expects a similar increase this year.

That roughly tracks the growth in gardening. The National Gardening Association says 43 million households were expected to garden last season, up from 36 million in 2008.

Jones says the tough economy and the environmental movement have contributed to the rise. One statistic that gladdens the heart of gardeners everywhere as well seed company owners, is that younger people are taking up vegetable gardening. In 2008, 21 percent of gardeners were 18 to 34, while only 11 percent were 35 to 44. Gardeners age 45 to 54 accounted for 24 percent, while 55 and over made up the largest gardening contingent with 44 percent of the total.

"Finally, we're getting some young people into gar-



Pat Mercer checks to see if the quantities are correct for the xeriscape floral mix.

dening," Jones says.

In addition to having more seed for the expected increased sales, Botanical Interests is adding more organic seeds and adding new varieties such as a red cabbage, a new French green bean, brussels sprouts, broccoli sprouts and purple carrots.

Jones and Seaborn try out new varieties in the 30-plus raised beds at their home.

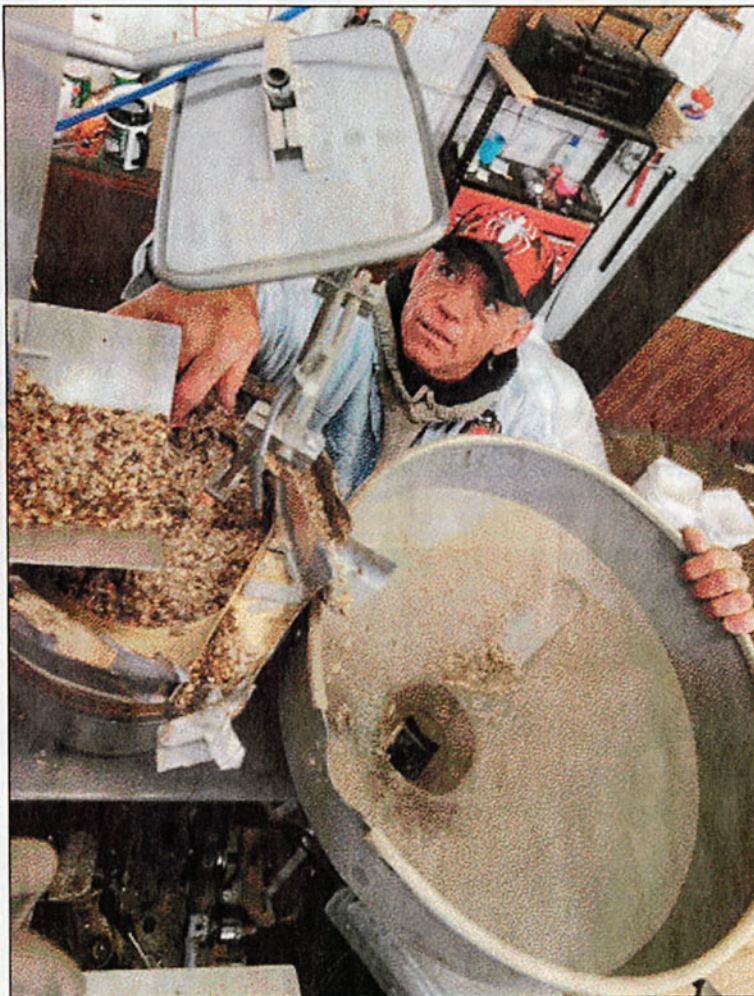
"We're out of control," Jones says.

Although the company does a large volume of sales, seed packaging is still a hands on activity.

Near the racks where employee seedlings grow are bottles of food coloring and a scale where employees hand-dye tomato seed to color-code it for the packet of multi-color cherry tomato seeds.

On the manufacturing floor, the company is in process or rearranging its inventory to make it flow more efficiently. While the seeds

See SEED, 2B



Pat Mercer keeps the seeds flowing in a xeriscape assortment package at Botanical Interests.

Photos by Cliff Grassmick | Camera



Joseph Martinez works with lettuce seeds being packaged at Botanical Interests.

## Seed company reaps from growing interest in gardening

*Continued from 1B*

are packaged by machines, sometimes a human touch is needed to make the whole thing work.

As seed drops into the pack for the Xeriscape Extreme blend, five-year employee Pat Mercer stands ready with a spoon to make sure the assortment, which contains seeds of different weights and sizes, is balanced.

"You need all the seed to get a pretty look," he says of the floral blend.

While 98 percent of the company's sales are to garden centers, its online business is also growing. This year, Botanical Interests added a paper catalog, as well as an iPhone app. One of Botanical Interests' points of pride has been its extensive cultivation information on the inside of the seed packet. That's now available in the \$5.99 app, as well as a feature that links to a National Gardening Association data base that allows gardeners to plug in their Zip Code to find out planting dates.

Many seed companies had shortages last year, and some are also expected to run short this year. Jones says his company is ready for the expected jump in sales. Currently, the company is out of 11 varieties out of 500. The outage for those varieties is due to factors such as crop failure, rather than poor planning, Jones says.

With heavy snow in much of the country, the rush hasn't hit yet, but the company is expecting retailers to order big as customers begin pouring in as the weather warms.

In the meantime, the employees' seeds are sprouted, and they're ready to fill some orders.

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Tomato seed from Botanical Interests. The company offers more than 500 varieties of seeds.



Bulk seed at Botanical Interests. Last year the company sold more than 6 million packets of seed.