

# *The Fun Miracle of Seed*



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**As the days shorten** and our plants begin to look tired, its easy to focus on the end of the harvest and garden cleanup. But this can be a time to start new plants, and that's a lot more fun. Some plants have a very short growing season, and thrive in our current weather, even as it cools. One of my favorites is radishes. They're so fast and so rewarding. On September 3, I planted three 7' rows of seeds; the seed about one half inch deep. Just took a few minutes. I was using seed that I had for a while, so the viability was questionable. Standard gardening texts say radish seed is good for four years. I planted two types of white radishes, and they were six and seven years old. I knew from experience that although the germination percentage would not be what it once was, certainly some of the seed would still be good. With fresh seed you try and plant them about 1.5" inches apart, if you're planting standard size radishes. So I sowed the seed a little heavier, counting on a reduced rate of germination. Those same gardening texts say the time from sowing to sprouting is 5-10 days. That might be true in early spring when weather is cooler, but in warm early September, its faster. The seedlings were visible in three days.



**Philadelphia Box, 32  
days after sowing**



**Ping Pong (left),  
Philadelphia Box (two  
rows right)**

The amount of information in a good seed catalog is nothing less than incredible. I'm looking at Johnny's Seeds catalog, in particular. I've mentioned that firm in past blogs. Based in Maine, their weather is not unlike ours, and they do lots of trialing. They seem to evaluate varieties fairly, based strictly on measurable results, with no obvious bias against certain categories of plants. Some catalogs, for example, have a dislike of hybrids, which I find to be very closed-minded. In the current Johnny's catalog you'll find the following information. If you want to plant a 100' row of radishes, you will need 1.5 ounces of seed. If you want to plant an acre of radishes, you will need 31 pounds of seed, and that amounts to over 1.5 million seeds. The yield of a 100' row is estimated to be 100 bunches, and the yield for an acre is 29,000 bunches. Johnny's standard radish seed packet contains 250 seeds, which they calculate to be a 7' row. (I think that's too dense. Why sow so thickly when you'll have to thin them out and discard them? I try to sow fresh radish seed with 1.5" spacing, so I don't have to thin them out. I want less work, not more.) The optimum temperature for germination is 75-87 degrees. And on

the information goes. This is just a sampling of the radish information offered by Johnny's. Fascinating reading for the garden enthusiast.



**Watermelon Radish  
spiral**



**Watermelon Radish**

On September 6, I planted a second sowing of radishes, for a later harvest. This time I planted the so called "watermelon" radish. When sliced, it resembles a watermelon. Its a longer season crop, up to eight weeks to maturity. Just for fun, I sowed the seed in a spiral. Adds a little unexpected zing to the garden. Growing radishes is a great activity to share with kids. The results are fast. The seed germinates quickly and some varieties can be harvested in a few weeks. They must be watered regularly and thoroughly. This is not a suggestion. Failure to do this will result in an inferior crop, and unhappy kids. Not to mention your own disappointment.



## Radish Fail

Sometimes radishes fail to “bulb.” That is, they look fine on top (the leaves) but when harvested, they look like string instead of a nice fat radish. Very disappointing. The books say this could be caused by overcrowding, failing to thin them out. Another cause is too much nitrogen, and not enough phosphorous, which is for root development and flowering. Radishes are roots, after all. I think there must be a third cause. I’ve had the experience where one plant produces a fine radish, and just a few inches away, on another plant of the same variety, the bulb fails to form. No overcrowding, and the same fertilizer. There are many mysteries in the garden. That’s part of the fun!

Please email me ([kevin@milaegers.com](mailto:kevin@milaegers.com)) with your questions and comments!

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