

# Going to Seed



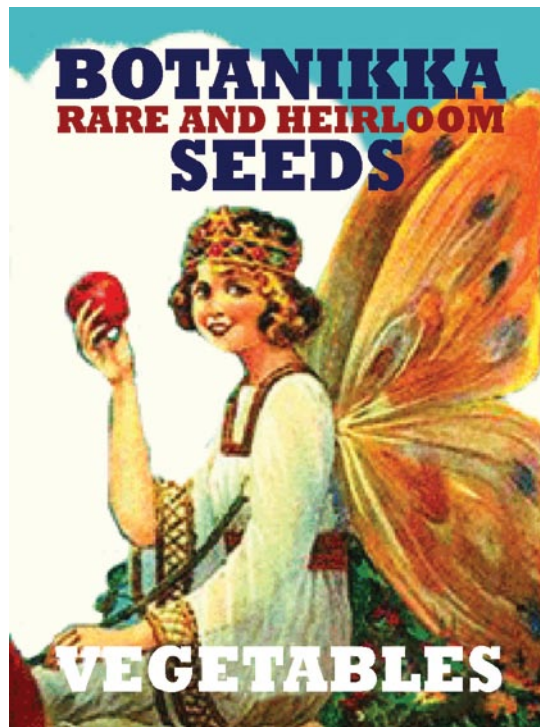
*Mark Ritter, the driving force behind Botanikka Seeds, checking some seedlings getting an early start.*

Local food is no longer a trend, it's becoming an institution. People are taking an interest in what they eat and where it comes from like no other time in history. They want to know where and how their food is grown and by whom. One sure way to do that is to grow your own.

Mark Ritter can help you decide what to grow based on your preferences, location, and available space. In 1999 he semiretired and was looking for something to do. He noticed that there were hundreds

of vegetables and herbs from around the world that were not available in the United States. Being a gardener himself, he decided that marketing those vegetables and herbs in the form of seeds would be a good thing to do. Thus Botanikka Seeds was born.

Mark started by buying all his seeds from other growers, with about 30% imported seeds for items that he was unable to source in the U.S. He bought 15 acres of land a few years ago and started growing some of the more exotic, hard-to-find seeds.



This year, for the first time, some of the seeds he is selling will be his homegrown seeds.

His goal for Botanikka Seeds is simply to reintroduce people to the joy of growing their own food. "Lots of our parents grew their own food to save money. But there are so many good things about growing your own food other than economics. First of all it's local, second of all it's good exercise, third there's a sense of satisfaction. It's just a great lifestyle."

Mark is quick to point out that much of his early success was due to concentrating on on-line sales. "I started up, mainly on eBay, and did real well. By 2005, I needed to buy seed-filling equipment to keep up. Before that it was all done by hand," said Mark. "Interestingly, a lot of orders go overseas, many to Australia. In August, September, and October we ship a lot to the southern hemisphere. They're starting their planting time when we're finishing ours. At this

## Bountiful Cupboard



(LEFT) Botanikka Seeds carries over 65 varieties of heirloom tomatoes. (RIGHT AND BELOW RIGHT) Purple cauliflower and spiral broccoli are two of the varieties offered in the Strange Vegetables Collection.



point, I'd say about 40% of the items we sell go overseas."

Slowly building inventory, Mark now offers more than 750 herb, vegetable, and flower seeds ranging in price from seed packets starting at \$1.19 to seed collections starting at \$10.95. Shipping for any size order is \$1.99. "I really try to keep the prices reasonable to encourage people to raise their own plants," stressed Mark.

What really sets Botanikka Seeds apart, and what Mark is most

proud of, are his seed collections that are tailored to specific needs. There are 16 currently available and 7 more on the way.

With the *E. coli* spinach scare in recent years, Mark has seen an upward trend in grow-your-own salad greens. Baby spinach mix, salad bowl mix, mild mesclun mix, spicy mesclun mix, and heirloom lettuce mix have all jumped in popularity in the past year. Mark added, "What's fun with the salad mixes is that you can grow them in a container on your deck.

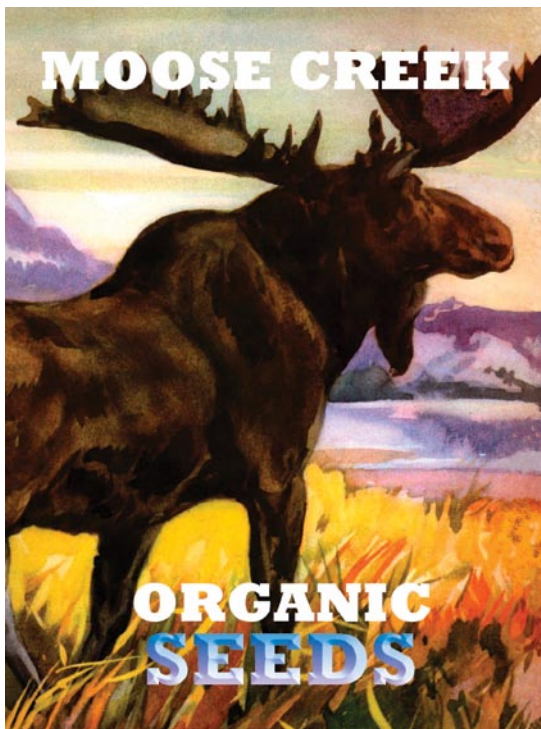
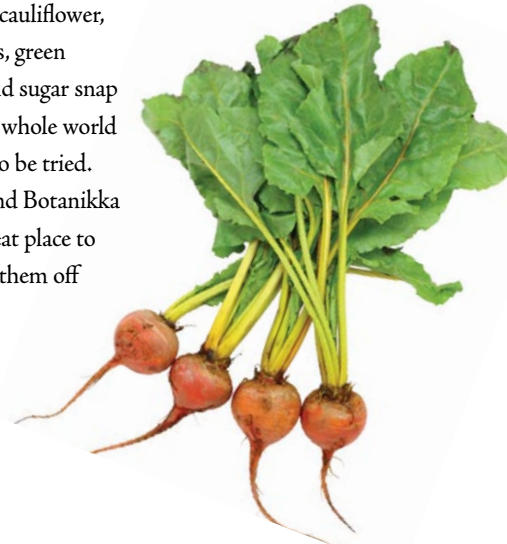
When you offer guests a salad, they can pick their own spicy greens to liven up plain lettuce. Just offer a bowl of water alongside to give them a quick rinse and pat them dry."

"One of our best sellers is a 1,000-seed pack of 65 varieties of heirloom tomatoes. The varieties are mixed all together. People love that they don't know what they're getting. Tomatoes will come up in all different shapes, sizes, and colors. The great thing about tomatoes is that you can save the seeds and replant them next year."

One of the more intriguing collections Botanikka offers is the Strange Vegetable Collection. These are vegetables that you definitely won't see in your local grocery store, but they will make an interesting tablescape. With this collection you can serve your family and guests white cherry tomatoes, purple cauliflower, green apple eggplant, golden beets, spiral broccoli, lemon cucumber, bloody butcher corn, New Zealand

spinach, and moon and star watermelon.

Growing your own vegetables doesn't require a large plot of land anymore. You also don't have to settle for the usual grocery store broccoli, cauliflower, brussel sprouts, green beans, corn, and sugar snap peas. There's a whole world of new tastes to be tried. Mark Ritter and Botanikka Seeds are a great place to start checking them off your list.



## • IF YOU GO •

Botanikka Seeds  
P.O. Box 182  
Iron Ridge, WI 53035  
(920) 349-8351  
www.botanikka.com  
eBay store: MNR Sales



**An online extra!**  
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