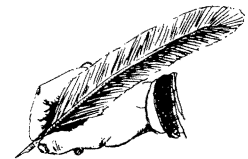


Seed, Seeds, and Seedlings

Seeds and seedlings are vitally important in crop production and in weed control. Weed scientists frequently write about them. The exact moment when a seed becomes a seedling is vague. Consequently "seed" and "seedling" sometimes are used incorrectly. For example:

Incorrect: Alfalfa seeds were planted on April 5,
and emerged April 10.

Correct: Alfalfa seeds were planted April 5,
and seedlings emerged April 10.



To avoid errors, always be sure that seeds germinate and seedlings emerge.

The name of a plant can apply to any stage of the plant's life cycle. Consequently, any confusion about "seed" and "seedling" in the above example can be avoided and the sentence can be shortened by writing, "Alfalfa was seeded April 5 and emerged April 10."

The plural of "seed" can be either "seed" or "seeds." Having chosen one form, do not change from one to the other.

If "seed" is used as the plural, then only the verb will indicate whether the word is singular or plural, e.g., The seed were planted in each pot. If "seeds" is used as the plural, then both the noun and verb indicate singular or plural form, e.g., The seeds were planted in each pot.

Something called a "collective singular" can complicate the use of seed (singular) and seed or seeds (plural). A collective singular is a collection of many individuals that is considered to be singular because it forms a unit with an individual identity.

When "seed" means a collection of many individual seeds used for planting, the word is singular. For example:

The wheat seed is (not are) in the grain drill.

The alfalfa seed was (not were) harvested.

The grass seed was (not were) sown.

A sample of more than one seed taken from a seed lot would be considered plural if individual seeds are considered, even if the sample is a small fraction of the total singular lot. For example:

From each bag of seed, 100 seeds were collected.

After planting, 50 seeds were dug up to determine seeding depth.

In the above examples, the choice of "seed" (collective singular) or "seeds" (plural) is fairly clear cut. Sometimes a quantity of seeds logically could be a unit (collective singular) or a number of individual seeds (plural). Then the choice of which one it shall be is entirely up to the author.

Remember:

After seeds begin to sprout

Then seedlings they become;

And the choice of seed or seedling

Need not be troublesome.

J. H. Dawson, U.S. Dep. Agric., ARS, Prosser, WA 99350