

# MAGIC OVERCOAT MAKES SEED BIGGER, EASIER TO PLANT

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Chicago — Carrots that require no thinning, corn that can be sown two weeks early without being harmed by cold weather, tomatoes that don't need transplanting: These are a few of the innovations in farming and backyard gardening that have been made possible by a new way of preparing seeds.

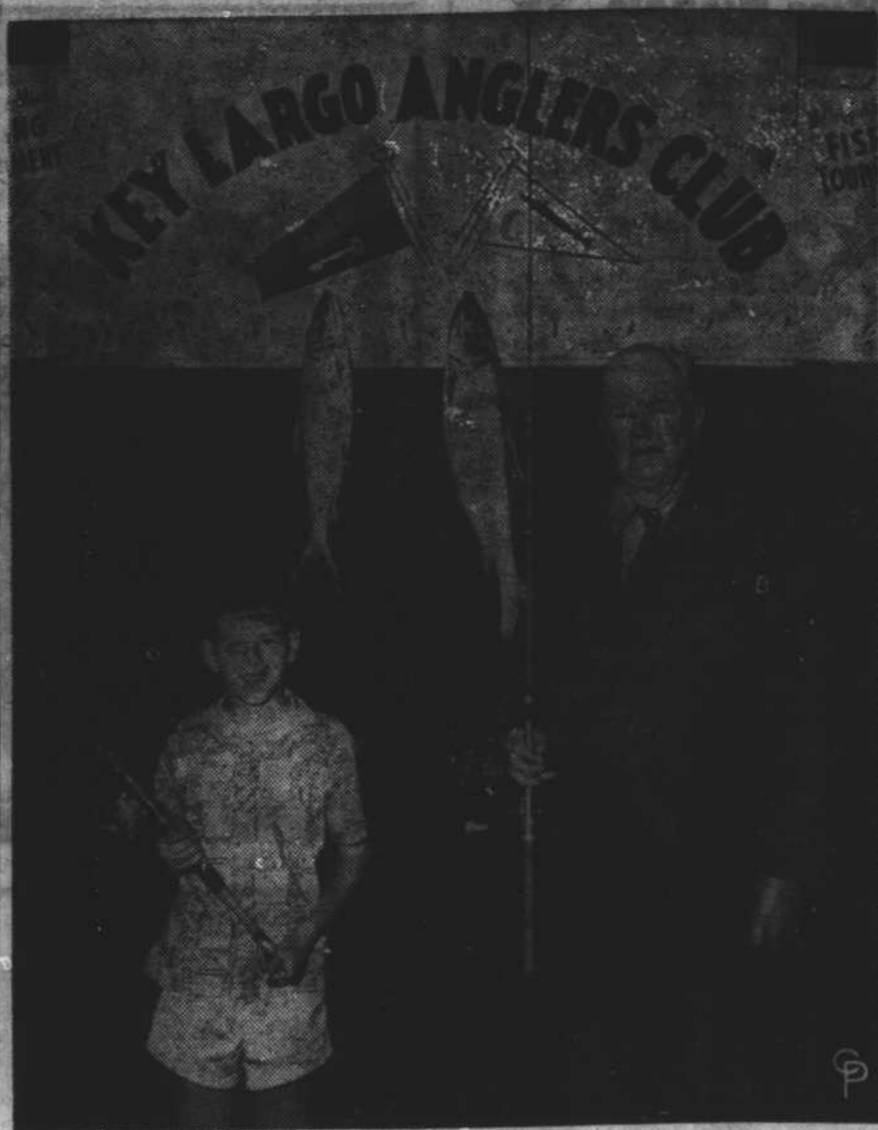
Pelleted seeds aim to give amateur farmers a greater output with less back-breaking hoeing and digging. They promise to trim costs for commercial growers. By paving the way for increased mechanization, they should boost farm machinery sales. Chemical companies should reap returns from the demand for coating ingredients.

### Commercial Sales Began Last Year

Under the new method, seeds are coated or "pelleted". Their coating makes even microscopically small seeds big enough so they can be planted one at a time and spaced so there are no excess plants to thin out. Inert ingredients such as powdered feldspar or volcanic ash add bulk to the tiny seeds. Chemicals included in the coating make plants grow faster, keep seeds alive during very dry or wet weather, act as a counter-agent against weed-killers and even shoe crows away.

While the new process is only now moving out of the experimental stage. Processed Seeds, Inc., of Midland, Mich., and Filtritol Corp. of Los Angeles, began selling pelleted seeds commercially last fall. Coated seeds were listed in the 1948 catalogs of two seed houses, Burgess Seed and Plant Co. offered 21 different varieties of pelleted vegetable and flower seeds and Cornell Seed Co. sold pelleted tomato seeds to commercial growers. A third firm, Crow's Hybrid Corn Co., of

# HOOVER REPORTS ON HIS CATCH



FORMER PRESIDENT Herbert C. Hoover poses with his grandson, Andy, and the two bonefish he took in a day's angling off Key Largo, Fla. One of the fish weighs seven pounds; the other, three. He will enter them in the Metropolitan Miami fishing tourney. (International Soundphoto)

Milford, Ill., coated all the seed corn it sold this year.

Next year, other firms are expected to handle coated seeds. Ferry Morse, one of the biggest in the seed business, for example, reports it has been "experimenting aggressively" with pelleted seeds and "hopes to offer them for the first time about a year from now."

If you've ever grown carrots in your garden, you can appreciate the advantages of a process that makes small seeds big. The seeds are so tiny that you scatter them along the row, far too generously for best result. If, like many gardeners, you can't bear to thin out and destroy many of the luxuriant young plants, you end up by getting carrots about as big-around as a toothpick. Using pea-sized pelleted seeds, you plant your carrots an inch or so apart. There's no thinning to do and you get big sturdy carrots. Commercial carrot growers not only save on seed but also don't have to pay for labor to do the thinning.

A 60 per cent saving in thinning costs, which average \$15 to \$20 an acre, and a 10 per cent higher yield resulted when tests were run by Filtritol with coated head lettuce seed in California. There were also 40 per cent more premium heads in the acreage sown with coated seeds, the company reports. Two pounds of uncoated seed were normally sown per acre; only five ounces of coated seed (excluding the weight of the coating) were needed for the same area.

Tobacco growers may stand to benefit, too. Tobacco seed is so small growers dump a teaspoonful into a watering can, then sprinkle the seed bed. When the plants are all an inch or two high they are transplanted to a cold-frame. Then they must be transplanted a second time into the field. Pelleted tobacco seed is big enough so one step can be skipped. The seed can be planted directly in the coldframe. Government and private experts are testing this new process.

**Flower Planting Aided**  
Flowers also offer a fertile field for pelleted seeds. Petunias, for example, have seeds about one-third the size of a pin head. There are 200,000 of them to the ounce. Some fancier varieties are worth more than ten times their weight in gold. They wholesale for as much as \$400 an ounce. Planting the bare seeds individually is impossible. But when coated, they can be sown one at a time as readily as peas or beans. Thinning or transplanting is unnecessary.

Have you ever tried to get sweet corn a little before your neighbor by sowing it several weeks early? Unless you had a run of unseasonably warm weather, most of the corn probably didn't even germinate. Several seed firms have run tests that show how not only corn, but also peas and beans behave in cold weather after being pelleted. In one such test, sweet corn was planted in a chamber where the temperature could be accurately controlled. For 14 days, the temperature was kept at 45 degrees; then it was raised to 86 degrees for eight days. Only 16 per cent of the untreated corn germinated. Varying mixtures of ingredients were used on the selected seed, the best of which produced 93 per cent germination.

Crow's Hybrid Corn Co. claims that on the average, coating gives a yield 10 bushels an acre

greater than that obtainable from untreated seed.

In addition to keeping seeds alive when it's cold, the coating helps lick other weather uncertainties. Seeds die when there's too much rain. But pelleted seeds will live through the heaviest soakings. Last spring for example, water stood on a field near Saginaw, Mich., for 15 days. Both pelleted and bare sugar beet seed had been planted in the

field. When the water subsided a normal proportion of the pelleted seed (about 88 per cent) grew. Less than 1 per cent of the bare seed survived.

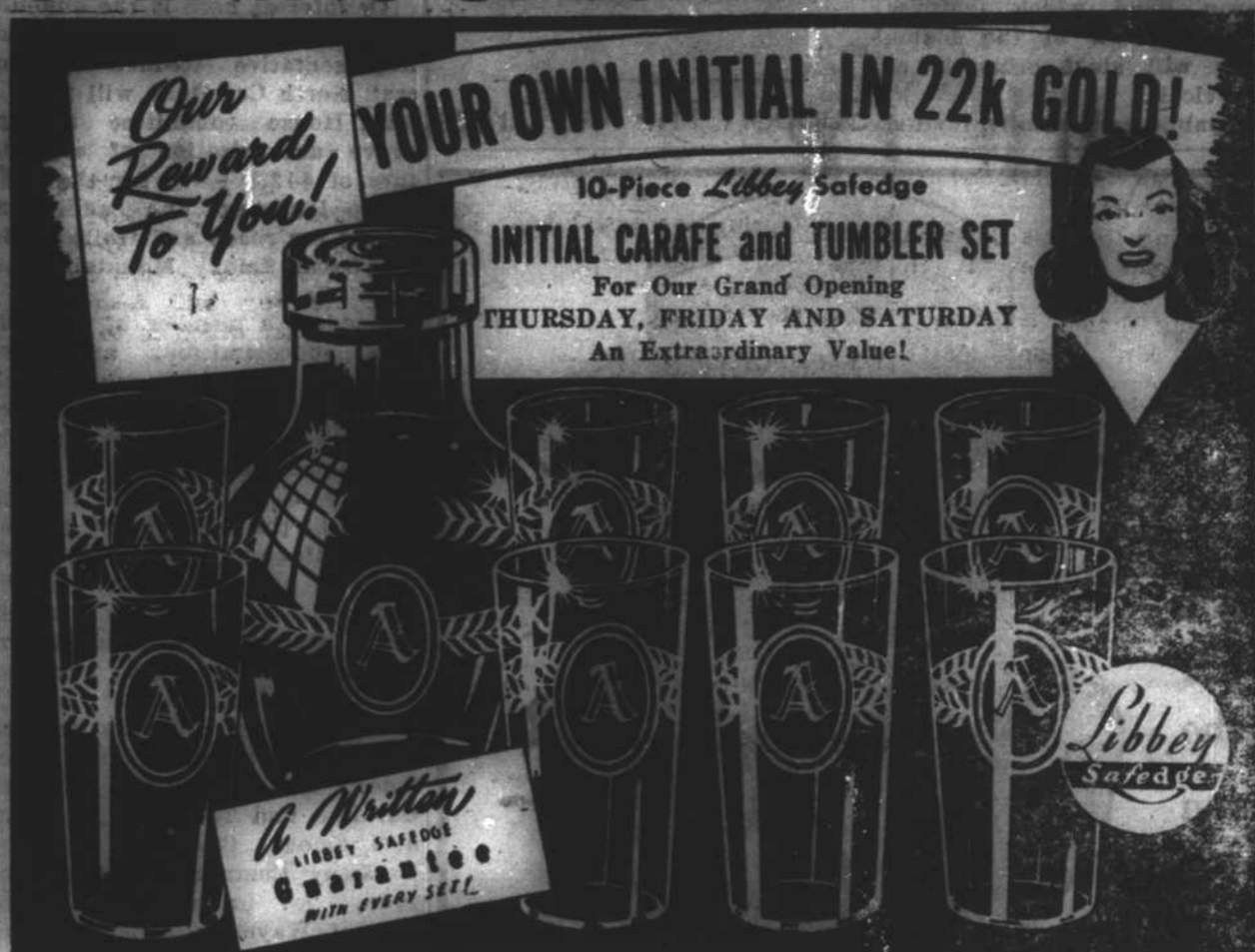
Pelleting also helps when there isn't enough rain. Extreme dryness, for example, is a tough problem in the semi-arid sections of the west. Range grasses, when planted from seed, often don't germinate if there's a run of dry

weather after they're sown.

Continued In Next Issue

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