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the truth about *feminized* *seeds*



(G-Spot) Young female ready to be pollinated



Young male ready to release pollen (Burmese)

We explain how “feminized” seeds are made, why the plants are more likely to turn male, and how to use normal seeds to get a large all-female crop

Written by G.
Photos by Kat
Vancouver Island Seed Company





Fucking incredible, three weeks into flowering

The idea of "feminized" seeds is heralded as a new wave of breeding enabling you to grow only females, but in reality it is a less reliable and less effective method than simply cloning your favorite plant. Feminizing seeds is nothing new; in fact, it's done from a process that used to be called "hermaphroditic breeding" or "Breeding with Herman".

During the 1970s and '80s it was often the case that the seeds you grew came from a bag of good bud. The bud usually had a name, but it was often made up by the local dealer trying to make his stash sound more exotic. In truth, you knew nothing about the parentage of the seeds that your bag contained. Sure, the female was great smoke – but you knew nothing of her size, shape, yield or genetics. The male involved was a total mystery; there was no way you could guess what the genetics of the pollen donor was. These seeds generally resulted in a range of plant genetics, which made one believe that there were a variety of males around when the female was budding.

As is often the case when genetics are mixed, you get failures and successes. More than one great breed was founded on a bag of random seeds. You would plant a hundred or so of the seeds you had, wait to see what Mother Nature – and your local dealer – had handed you, keep your fingers crossed hoping for a super-breed, and watched as some of the seeds came up. A few of the seedlings were sickly and didn't live long.

while others were strong, vigorous, and grew like weeds (pun intended), so you culled the sickly, nourished the healthy, and picked your favorites.

Through this lengthy and detailed process you would end up with a number of healthy young marijuana plants, which would be transplanted into large containers and, after ten to fourteen days, introduced to a budding cycle of 12 hours light and 12 hours dark. This causes the plants to elongate and show their sex, so it was easy to quickly find and kill the males and wait patiently (or impatiently!) for the remaining females to develop buds and ripen. Doing this inside grow rooms and greenhouses was easy and effective, but the seed planting and selection procedure had to be repeated every year, and crops varied from big and dense to small and weak. We also found that after all that trouble of removing males, we sometimes ended up with females that switched sexes when they were stressed, resulting in accidental cross breeding – female plants were pollinated by females that developed male sex organs (hermaphrodites). We decided to grow out those seeds and, to our joy, we discovered that the ratio of females to males was skewed to a greater number of females. This was our discovery of hermaphroditic breeding.

Around the same time we were re-introduced to the method of cloning – I say re-introduced because while it wasn't a process we had been using, it was a simple gardening technique my grandmother had shown me years before as "making cuttings". She would cut off a branch of a plant with a sharp knife and stick it into a hormone rooting solution, homemade from pieces of willow tree branches soaked in water. Growers these days buy rooting hormone, but the process is identical.

I had a crop of 20 young plants of various strain backgrounds. We took two clones from each of the plants, and then used the budding light cycle to force the sex to show. Once we identified the male plants (half of them) we killed them and their clones, which still left us with ten large budding females and their 20 clones.

Now we had ten different hybrid genetics in total with two clones from each to work with and choose from. Even though we were making great strides, we wanted a room full of the same breed with the same size and characteristics. Basically, we wanted many copies of one great female plant so made the decision to play "Breeding Hermans". We took

two clones from one female plant, stressed one of the clones until it developed male sex organs, and then bred it with the other female clone. To our delight it worked – we ended up with seeds that grew into females 85-90 percent of the time and were consistent with the original female plant's characteristics. We could now plant around 30 to 40 seeds and end up with 30 female plants the same size with the same genetics. We were ecstatic.

However, silver linings often have a cloud attached and it was true in this case. The female plants that developed from hermaphroditic seeds had the drawback of being far more



likely than ordinary plants to develop male branches – turn “Herman” – when stressed. More than once, a power, pump or light failure caused enough stress to the plants that they easily went hermaphroditic. Outdoors we had even more trouble; in bad-weather years we could end up with a plant from a feminized seed developing male flowers and blowing pollen all over the other plants, ruining our dreams of a sinsemilla crop. We decided that feminized plants might have a place in our business’ industry, but it wouldn’t be in our gardens.

It was our dream to grow rooms full of females of consistent genetics, and we made our dream come true by going back to cloning. It was so simple that we couldn’t believe that we hadn’t thought of it before. We planted ten normal seeds and nourished them with love and care, but this time we took 25 clones from each plant instead of just two. Then we put the mothers into bud cycle and sexed them; within ten days we identified and killed off the male plants and their clones, and found that we had six large females in bud and around 150 female clones. We continued to bud the mothers as we began to grow our female clones, and finally



VISC Burmese male in flower



Clones in worked cups



decided there were two plants that stood out from the crowd – they were bigger, denser, and smelled the best, so we kept their clones and culled the others. We harvested all of the mothers then placed the 50 chosen young marijuana plants into two rooms and switched them to the budding cycle. We had developed a process that made our dream a reality: grow-rooms full of consistent female plants.



It doesn't take a horticulturist to see that using cloning to procure a room full of female cannabis plants is far more economical than growing "feminized seeds" that easily go hermaphroditic. It is simple to grow numerous female plants with only a few seeds of known genetics. For example, if you get ten seeds from a world-class marijuana breeder/bank, such as Burmese from Vancouver Island Seed Company (VISC), those seeds should become ten seedlings. At three to four weeks, take ten cuttings from each of the plants, then flip the plants to the bud cycle. Kill males as they show their sex and get rid of their clones, and you should be left with about five large budding females (more or less) and 50 guaranteed female clones of the same pure genetics, without any hermaphroditic tendencies.

So, for the price of ten seeds you end up with dozens of pure female plants, instead of purchasing "feminized" seeds only to get an unstable and unpredictable hermaphroditic breed. You can use regular seeds to grow an all-female crop, and that's why we don't sell feminized seeds. ●

- Vancouver Island Seed Company and Liberty Seeds and be found online at www.vancouverseed.com



VISC Passionfruit





You Can Have It All!



*Check
out the
VISC article
in this issue
on pages
56-61*

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