We love to plant many different varieties of each vegetable, in an effort to find out which does best. Lettuce is a good example, and I like the summer crisp, or Batavia, kinds. While the romaines and others are bolting, during the first week of summer, the summer crisps are still crisp.

Nevada makes a pretty, light green head that holds up well in the field. Concept is a darker green, bigger head. Both of these varieties are tender and crisp. The other summer crisp lettuce we grow is a beautiful red-tinged one called Magenta.

Jericho comes from Israel, where it was bred for heat tolerance. It's a romaine type, but doesn't make a tight head. The light green heads can get huge. Paris Island and White Cos are the two other romaines we grow, and they bolted quickly in the dry June weather. They do better in the fall garden.

Red Sails is a Grand Rapids variety that makes a loose head that is really red. It wilts after harvest faster than the others. The loose heads are called leaf lettuce. Black Seeded Simpson is the most common.

Our favorite bibb lettuce is Buttercrunch, with thick outer leaves and a blanched, buttery heart. They don't like hot weather. Winter Density is taller and like a bibb/romaine cross.

The Lollo lettuces are the real frilly ones. They come in light green or dark red colors, and are harvested when young. We don't grow these anymore. I found them to be pretty but not as good eating quality as the others.

Oak leafs are lobed, and also come in colors ranging from green to red. I'm not crazy about these, either. Many of them were bred for looks rather than flavor.

It's important to me to run research trials on how different varieties do under organic growing practices in middle Tennessee. The research done at colleges has a different focus. I learned about this when I was growing up.

Land grant colleges do research projects, but the practices are not organic. They test agricultural products such as fertilizers, herbicides, insecticides, fungicides, and pesticides. The funding these colleges receive comes from large corporations which make these products.

Professors whose research shows that such products may not be necessary are quickly fired. This has caused the widespread belief that chemicals are needed in farming. Follow the money trail and we find agricultural extension recommendations that reflect the corporate funding.

On the other hand, I don't think you should buy stuff for farming. Obviously, organic research is not a good idea if you are trying to sell stuff to farmers. So organic farmers over the last 30 years have been doing their own, on-farm research.

A variety that does well with chemicals doesn't interest me. I need to know how it performs under organic growing conditions. Unfortunately, my research projects are flawed from lack of time, money, and knowledge. Fortunately, they are chronicled each week in these articles.