



**Gene Milstein  
Applewood Seed, Arvada, Colorado**

**Launched by Gene Milstein 50 years ago**, Applewood Seed Company started as a small cottage



industry. Milstein studied physics, biochemistry, and political science at UC Berkeley in the early 1960s. What really grabbed his attention, however, were the extensive San Juan Bautista flower field trials he passed as he drove from campus to the Army National Guard station in Gilroy, California. Smitten by the scene, he began working at the Denver Botanic Gardens after returning to his hometown, and growing flowers in his parents' back yard. He picked the seed, packaged it, and peddled his flower seed packets, hand-drawn by his mother, to health food stores, pharmacies, and hardware stores.

**About two years later, a local nurseryman offered Milstein five pounds of wild blue columbine seed.** And so he entered the world of wildflowers, collecting and marketing packets of wildflower seeds to garden centers and gift shops in resorts like Vail and Aspen. Applewood gradually developed herb and sprout-indoor packet seed lines as well as horticultural accessories, including planter kits, potpourri, and even flowerpot breads. Eventually the company's "headquarters" moved from his parents' house to the basement apartment of his wife-to-be, and then to the home they purchased together. The retail product and bulk wildflower seed business boomed in the 70s and 80s, and in 1982 Milstein and his wife Dee bought a building and 1½ acres of land in Arvada, Colorado—the current headquarters.

When Dee retired in 1997, the Milsteins sold the retail products division, making Applewood solely a wholesale flower seed production company. Most of the 15 loyal employees have been with the company for many years. In January 2015 the company celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary.



**“The seed business has enabled us to see the world,” Milstein reflects.** “And it has been our privilege to bring beauty and color to people and the landscape.” Travel has been a big part of Gene and Dee’s lives, especially as their sales grew internationally as well as domestically. “We visit our customers, but we also travel for adventure,” says Milstein. Tennis, metaphysics, music, art, and dance are a few of the other interests he and Dee share.



Applewood’s Colorado facility includes 1/1/2 acres of trial gardens and an 18,000 square foot building with a seed-testing laboratory where all incoming seed is identified and checked for purity and rate of germination. If the seed meets the high standards, it moves on to a field-testing program, where it is evaluated for performance—and beauty of course. It’s all about the beauty!

**From Alyssum to Zinnia, and everything in between,** wholesale flower seeds are Applewood’s business. If you have purchased a packet of flower seeds in recent years, you have more than likely purchased repackaged Applewood seed. “We sell seed in all fifty states and around the world,” says Milstein. By growing in diverse geographical areas, Applewood can provide the right conditions for each individual flower type. “Every flower has its ideal climate,” Milstein explains, “and some need to be hand-collected.” The company produces 300 different wildflowers, and a large number of garden flowers as well, working with over 100 seed growers.

What makes our company uniquely suited for its role, Milstein says, is that we began as a packet seed company. “We know what packet seed companies want and need,” he adds. “We know labeling regulations, package design, and we know home gardeners’ preferences.”

#### **Pollinators and Wildflowers: Perfect Together!**

Responding to the news of declining pollinators, Applewood Seed Company added regional pollinator seed mixes to its extensive selection of bulk seed blends. If you’ve admired a highway median populated by colorful wildflowers, or a patch of flowers near a golf clubhouse, you have likely seen the beautiful results. Fragrant, Knee-high, Dry, Moist, Native, you name it: there’s a bulk seed mix for every desire!