



Inherited **GOODNESS**

If you want to grow vegetables at home, consider cultivating heirloom or old heritage varieties – truly tasty vegetables of yesteryear.

WHETHER YOU ARE A KEEN GARDENER or a novice, creating a productive home vegetable garden can be very rewarding, and the range of vegetables available is enormous. Whether you choose to buy young seedlings from the garden centre and plant them directly or are prepared to grow them from seed.

The merits of heirloom and hybrid seeds is a hot topic of discussion. Seed-saving organisations, specialty seed companies, and home gardeners have been the agents which have kept heirloom varieties in existence over time, ensuring old varieties are not lost and kept safe for future generations.

So what are heirloom and heritage varieties? They are basically open-pollinated plants that grow true from seed. Open-pollinated seeds are a result of either natural or human selection for specific traits that are then re-selected in every crop.

The seeds you buy at our garden centre, even the fruit and vegetables you purchase from the supermarket or organic farms are likely to be hybrid varieties. These are developed by companies for pest resistance, fast growth and uniformity. They are often bred for qualities related to easy machine harvesting, long distance transport and refrigeration. Proponents of heirloom varieties would argue hybrid varieties don't taste as good as the traditional varieties and that heirloom varieties do have good disease resistance and the yields are often higher than hybrids.



ABOVE Seed specialists Kings Seeds have a range of heirloom vegetables for sale including a range of pumpkins and butternuts. Many of which can be found in the My Garden organic produce garden in Christchurch. **FAR LEFT** The growers at My Garden utilise space by growing their Runner Beans on an angle. **LEFT** Kings Seeds Jack Be Little Pumpkins. These cute mini pumpkins are just 7cm across and 5cm high; children are entranced by them and may enjoy growing their own.





The heirloom seed is kept true to type through selection and isolation; the flowers of open-pollinated seed varieties are pollinated by bees or wind. This means they are capable, of producing seeds from this seasons plants, which will produce seedlings that will be just like the parent plant. This ability to reproduce a virtual clone gives heirloom vegetables the label 'true to type'. The seeds of the heirloom are then passed from generation to generation. They all have distinct flavours and grow best in different types of conditions and soil. Hybrids on the other hand are the result of a cross between various varieties.

To qualify as heirloom vegetables, the variety must have some historic value, be at least 40-50 years old and be no longer available in the commercial seed trade. If the vegetable is grown in an industrial setting, it is no longer classified as heirloom. If you enjoy saving seed, you can choose those open-pollinated heirloom varieties that produce great-tasting and easy-to-grow harvests and save seed from their best plants to use every season. Making them ideal for home gardeners.

Some common heirloom vegetables grown in small gardens are tomatoes, corn, beans, squash, lettuce and even potatoes. There is a wonderful sense of history attached to some of the old

varieties, some even dating back from prehistoric times. A famous heirloom tomato called Brandywine is one of the most well-known varieties, it has been around since 1895. For sheer flavour power, Brandywine is one of the most popular of all heirloom tomato varieties. The fruit is pink with green shoulders and very large. The flavour is full and well balanced – a rich blend of sweet with tart – and the seed cavity is small so the slices are solid and meaty. Another popular variety is the 'Mortgage Lifter', developed in the 1930s by Charlie Byles of West Virginia. Charlie sold plants for \$1.00 and paid off his \$6000 mortgage in six years! The extremely large, slightly flat, pink fruit can grow to around a kilo. This variety is famous for its productivity and disease resistance.



ABOVE RIGHT TO LEFT From artichokes to lettuces there are a variety of everyday vegetables which have a heirloom counterpart. Including capsicums, as seen here an alternative to the common-day green, yellow or red varieties is the Purple Beauty. The artichoke pictured is a Purple de Jesi and the lettuce Rough de hive. All available from Kings Seeds. **BELOW** Companion planting is an important aspect of any garden. Marigolds will bring ladybirds to the garden which will prevent aphids from destroying your crop – creating biodiversity in your garden. **OPPOSITE PAGE** Two heirloom eggplant varieties demonstrate the difference which can be found within vege types. Seen here is the Long Purple Eggplant and Black Beauty.



Tips For Growing

- ▶ Before planting consider sunlight, rootstocks, prevailing wind and drainage. Nature's Garden Fertiliser can be used alongside compost to aid growing.
- ▶ Trees are best planted in winter as most will have lost their leaves – so once they are in the ground they will give all their focus to establishing their root systems.
- ▶ Don't forget about the bees. Some of the trees are self-fertile and are good pollinators for other trees, Duff's Early Jewel plums and Seckel pears for example, so think about that before you choose the trees.

- Romi Curl, Kaiwaka Organics



ABOVE Tomatoes are easy to grow and a staple vege in many houses, hence the huge number of varieties available – each one with its own unique shape, colour, texture and size. Pictured here are the Black Crim, Garden Peach, Green Sausage, Tigerella, Leo Of Casino and Pink Brandy Wine varieties.

Heirloom vegetables are also becoming popular with chefs. They are choosing heirloom varieties because they offer a chance to play with new colours in dishes – they also vary in taste to the modern-day versions.

A renewed interest in old or heirloom or heritage varieties has meant an interesting range has become available via mail order, classified adverts in gardening magazines or bought online. Once you have chosen your heirloom seeds, the seeds can be planted much like any other seeds of that plant type. Simply plant, nurture and enjoy! ■

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Heirloom in the Kitchen

The intense and natural flavours found in heirloom veges will make them a favourite in the kitchen as well as the garden.

We used 14 different varieties of tomatoes for this fresh and delicious salad, including the Leo Of Casino variety which was bought back from World War Two in the cuffs of a soldiers pants! Combined with other local and organic flavours this simple salad clearly demonstrates the unique colours and shapes which can be found in heirloom varieties.

Simple combinations and cooking techniques will ensure that no matter what heirloom vege you are serving up, the flavour will be crisp, intense and simply yummy.

