

Edible heirlooms

Plan for the future—grow old-time fruits and vegetables from seed

BY JULIE CHAI

WHAT THEY ARE

Passed down through generations, “heirloom” veggies and fruits are varieties at least 50 years old, preserved for their exceptional flavor, appearance, and vigor. They haven’t been genetically modified, and most have been open-pollinated—that is, by insects, birds, or wind. If you save the seeds and they don’t get cross-pollinated, they will give you the same crops every year. The best thing about heirlooms is that thousands of mouthwatering varieties are available—more than you’d find at the biggest farmers’ market.



Sharing the dividends

Seed packets often contain more than you can use, so organize a swap. Place extra seeds, sorted by variety, into small envelopes or round tins. Ask like-minded friends to do the same, and then throw a seed-exchange party.



WHERE TO GET THEM

Putting down roots

While many brick-and-mortar stores are retreating to the Web, Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds (rareseeds.com or 707/509-5171) went in the other direction; the online retailer saw such a surge in sales that it opened the **Seed Bank** in Petaluma, California. Housed in an old bank building, the store carries more than 1,400 varieties of heirloom seed. “Entire families are shopping for seeds, and kids are gardening as well,” manager Paul Wallace says. “And when you can buy a packet of seeds for a few dollars, it’s a tremendous value.” >38

OTHER HEIRLOOM SEED SOURCES

- » Abundant Life Seeds abundantlifeseeds.com
- » Botanical Interests botanicalinterests.com
- » Bountiful Gardens bountifulgardens.org
- » Native Seeds/SEARCH nativeseeds.org
- » Nichols Garden Nursery nicholsgardennursery.com
- » Renee’s Garden reneesgarden.com
- » Seeds of Change seedsofchange.com