

Sustainability of Heirlooms

By Shannie McCabe for Baker Creek Heirloom
Seed Company

What is an Heirloom?

An heirloom is a plant that is open pollinated, its was selected naturally and its characteristics are typically stabilized so that you can save the seeds and those planted will resemble the plant you saved them from. Heirlooms are typically older than 50 years and have some kind of story or cultural significance.





Heirlooms Are

- Open Pollinated
- NOT Hybrid
- Ideal for seed savers
- Typically have a story e.g Fish Pepper
- Typically 50 Years old (with some exceptions e.g Wild Boar Farms)
- Densely Nutritious e.g Kyo Yasai
- Selected for Superior Flavor
- Pollinator Friendly- more pollen and nectar for butterflies and other beneficials



Open Pollination

Definition: Pollination by natural means- wind, insects, birds and humans

Sustainability Factors:

- Exchange of pollen is not tightly controlled, therefore genetic diversity is stronger, more resilient and adaptable- Wide Genetic Base
- More characteristics to pull from, disease resistance and more- nature's tool box





Heirlooms are Not Hybrid

Hybrid Definition: A method of pollination requiring intensive human intervention, where pollen of two different species is crossed.

Sustainability

- Pro- hybrid vigor, yield, resistance
- Cons- Cannot save seeds year after year, more expensive, must buy again

Better for Seed Savers

- The open pollinated nature means easier to save seed
- More inexpensive to save your own seed year after year
- Cultivate your own landrace over time, an heirloom perfectly tailored to your region
- Seed security, threats to the global seed supply e.g covid
- The individual creates a living seedbank
- Preserves heritage and tradition



Rich History

- Seeds that are passed down generation to generation
- Brought under tremendous pressure: e.g seeds brought from Africa during the trans atlantic slave trade
- Example: the fish pepper and Horace Pippin
- Hopi Black Dye Sunflower: Ancient Dye Plant



Typically 50 Years Old

- Some define an heirloom as an open pollinated variety that is 50 years or older
- Some do not require heirlooms be 50 years old, inclusive to new OP breeders
- Modern Day OP Breeders: Frank Morton, Wild Boar Farms, Fred Hempel, Ed Shultz, Carl Barnes



Densely Nutritious

- “Crop nutrition has been compromised by the emphasis on edible yield”
- https://www.researchgate.net/publication/333605743_Pursuing_the_potential_of_heirloom_cultivars_to_improve_adaptation_nutritional_and_culinary_features_in_a_changing_climate
- E.g- Kyo Yasai, traditional Vegetables of Japan, scientifically shown to be more nutrient dense
- Bright colors= rich in antioxidants



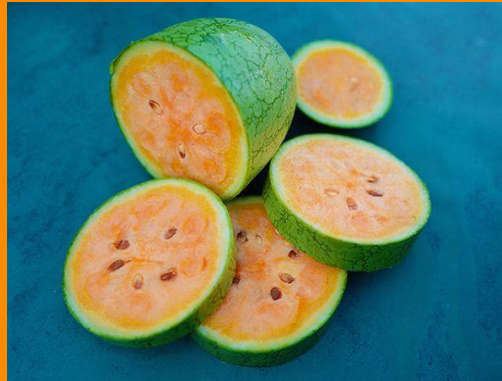
Kyoto Red Carrot

Superior Flavor

Heirlooms are, above all, selected for superior flavor, texture and focused on culinary application. Dream up your culinary experience (canning, pickling, roasting) and choose variety from there.



**Red Kuri- Best flavor, but
bruisable**



**Kaho Watermelon- Delicious
flavor, thin skin easy bursts**



**Orange Accordion- Juicy sweet,
but awkward, bad for packing**

Pollinator Friendly



- O.P varieties are typically more rich in nectar and pollen
- Many O.P varieties are native wildflowers
- Many hybrids no longer possess characteristics that make easy access to nectaries for pollinators
- Nectary: The location of the sugary nectar on a flower.
- Pollen Rich: OP varieties have easy access to pollen grains in order to entice insects to help pollinate them.
- Many insects feed on pollen.

Pollen Access

E.g Wild Dahlia Vs Modern day variety

Emphasis on double petals and fluffy heads has made pollen and nectar access more difficult for pollinators

1. Wild Dahlia in Costa Rica, open face, easy access to pollen
2. Intensively bred heirloom, very pretty but slightly less pollinator friendly





Coreopsis

- Tickseed Coreopsis is native to rocky prairies in the Ozarks
- Incredible Dwarf Mix Coreopsis- A dainty and delightful dwarf variety with gorgeous array of sunset colors. Compact and tidy plants reach about 16 inches tall and about as wide. A cottage garden accent or border plant, it also performs well in pots, raised beds and meadows. Versatile and irresistible to pollinators.



Dotted St. Johns Wort (*Hypericum punctatum*)

A famous plant in natural medicine and a native wildflower of the Midwest, Atlantic coast and into eastern Canada. This pollinator magnet is super easy to grow and is a beautiful perennial addition to the medicinal garden, as its flowers produce the highest amount of hypericin, the purple/red tinted juice that has holistic vitality and medicinal qualities. Be sure to take precautions and consult with a physician before using.



— Bee Balm (Monarda)

(Monarda Fistulosa) A perennial that is popular with pollinators. This wildflower is native to the prairies, plains, meadows and pastures of North America. The aromatic foliage is reminiscent of oregano and the flowers range in shades of earl grey to lavender and pink. An important nectar plant for native bees and possesses a host of medicinal benefits!

(Monarda punctata) Perennial. What a unique pagoda-style bloom that people and pollinators equally love! Great for deer resistant and low maintenance gardens. Native to the prairies of the great lakes region and east



Monarda Fistulosa



Monarda punctata

Chocolate Daisy (Berlandia lyrata)

An easy-to-grow native wild flower with blooms that smell of hot cocoa.

The stamens of the flower are edible and taste faintly of chocolate!

Various medicinal uses of this plant have been documented among Native American communities. Hardy from USDA zones 2-10. Highly attractive to beneficial insects. Native to the Western plains, grasslands and roadsides.



Echinacea Purpurea

**Native to Eastern
North America**

**Present across
north america**

**Immune boosting
medicinal
properties**



Echinacea Pallida

(Echinacea pallida) This is an excellent choice for those who like the company of hummingbirds and butterflies in their garden.

Native to the eastern half of the U.S. and up to Canada, this is a

super adaptable and easy to grow flower that the Native

Americans held in high esteem as a powerful medicinal. They

require very little care; as long as they aren't excessively moist,

they will thrive just about anywhere.



Echinacea

can be harvested and made into an herbal tea that studies have shown may help boost the immune system, a must have for cold and flu season.



Green Twister



Paradiso Mix



Mellow Yellows



Thank you!

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Check out Baker Creek Heirloom Seed
Company at rareseeds.com