



HEIRLOOM VEGETABLES

The living artifacts of edible delicacies

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Heirloom vegetables are indeed not any special plant species. It is used to describe any vegetable seed that has been saved and cultivated over many years. Some even define heirloom plants by the number of years they were grown. The term “cultivar” aptly stands out for heirloom vegetables, as they have their own specific characteristics which remained unaltered even after generations. Any vegetable that has been utilised prior to 1951 are termed as heirloom vegetables, after which hybrid vegetables overtook the grounds of cultivation. Many of these speciality plants have been saved even for several years or centuries as they showed their superiority in performance in home and market gardens.

Most of these group of vegetables have their heritage traced back to hundreds of years. All heirloom plants are open pollinated indicating that their seeds can be stored every year, resulting in the cultivation of “true-to-type” cultivars. Even now some horticulturists or gardeners prefer heirloom vegetables owing to their superior taste and wide range of colours, shapes and flavours. In order to favour large scale commercial production owing to increased profits, home gardeners shifted towards hybrid varieties disrupting the balance of heirloom cultivation and conservation.

WHY HEIRLOOM VEGETABLES?

- Represents a diverse gene pool with varied shapes, flavours, colours and growth habit.
- Preserves rich horticultural heritage.
- Provides unique and delicious edible crops with exceptional flavour.
- Embodies the connection with age-old garden cultivation practices.
- Heirloom varieties offer irregular shapes, assorted shades and varied textures.

HEIRLOOM VEGETABLES - A GLANCE

Watermelon Radish

Similar to Chinese Daikon radishes, they have a green skin with red or pink interior. The taste seems to be relatively mild with a slight peppery taste. They can be consumed as cooked foods or even as salad vegetables.



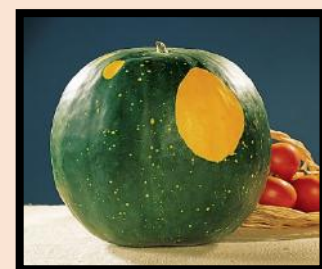
Lolla Rossa Lettuce

This Italian heirloom vegetable is a frilly, loose leaved variety with red tips which adds a nutty flavour to the salads. It matures in 55 days and higher temperature is likely found to induce bolting.



Moon and Star Watermelon

The watermelon is itself a true taste sensation which one would not have eaten in years. It has a dark green, lumpy- bumpy rind with yellow patches. The flesh is bright red, considerably juicy and intensely sweet in taste. They attain maturity in 100 days.



Blue Hubbard Squash

Cucubita maxima has a visually arresting blue grey skin that are unusually attractive having regular orange flesh. They are tender and starchy with nutty flavour similar to that of cooked pumpkin. With enhanced sweetness, they are great for making purees and pies. It can be harvested in about 110 days.



Lemon cucumber

They have round pale-yellow skin as in lemon but belongs to *Cucumis sativus*, cucumber group. Lemon cucumbers are known for their mild, slightly sweet flavour similar to those of lemon. As it provides a refreshing crunch, it can also be used in salads. With a requirement of full sunlight, it matures in 60 to 70 days. It has also received the geographical indication tag making it a unique species of Nagaland.



Hopi Corn

This is a classic example of different colored corn varieties. Frequent in Central and Southern Mexican cuisine, it is associated with a number of traditions and are also used in the production of blue corn chips. Its exceptional taste enables it to be eaten as sweet corn when young, roasted and dried at later stages. It matures in about 90 days.



Banana Legs Tomato

Banana legs tomatoes are distinguished by their bright yellow skin, which is long and narrow when ripe, unlike many other tomato varieties. The distinctive appearance of the tomato itself makes it an attractive accompaniment to salads. Banana legs tomatoes are also well-suited for ketchup, as they produce a yellow sauce that can be a source of conversation. The tomato's taste is relatively mild, and its texture is meaty.



Purple Potato

The purple majesty potato, like the other purple products on this list, is not artificially coloured. Rather, it is a deep purple potato variety, both internally and externally. The potato has a sweet, buttery flavour and can be consumed in the same manner as any other potato. It is particularly suitable for use in dishes where its colour contrasts with other ingredients, for example, in potato salads or simply mashed potatoes. Additionally, the rich colour of the purple majesty potatoes is associated with a high concentration of natural flavonoids which can contribute to improved health.



Peter Peppers

Peter peppers are a type of heirloom chili pepper that is distinguished by its unusual shape. When ripe, the peppers may be red in colour, yellow in colour, or have shades of gray in

between. Peter peppers have a very high scoville rating, indicating that they are very spicy. Consequently, some have suggested that the pepper is better suited for ornamental purposes rather than for human consumption. Nevertheless, the pepper is occasionally used as a picker.



Turkish eggplant

At first sight, the orange fruits of Turkish eggplants appear to be more closely resembling heirloom tomatoes rather than traditional eggplants. The appearance of the orange fruits bears little resemblance to that of a standard eggplant. However, they are as versatile as traditional eggplants and have a similar interior structure. As a result, they can be used in almost any application



where a normal eggplant would be used. The eggplant is available in mature or immature growth stages, and many people use it when the fruit is immature and still green.

LOCALLY ADAPTED HEIRLOOMS ON VERGE OF CRITICISM?

- Major drawback is their lack of resistance to pest and disease, most importantly of *Verticillium* and *Fusarium* wilt.
- Certain vegetables are more fragile or perishable.
- Irregular shapes and size do not attract consumers.
- Heirloom vegetables face backlash in processing industries.

The principal and only way to make an heirloom product is to design something that people will need not just this year, but for the next 50 or 100 years.

-Saul Griffith