

Some of the Most Popular WARM WEATHER HEIRLOOM Vegetable Varieties

HEIRLOOM BEANS ***= Available as a transplants during planting season at Rainbow #1**

Soil pH - 6.0 - Sow the seeds 1 inch deep, about 6 inches apart, in rows 18 inches apart. Beans do not do well in a wide row planting. They must have room on either side for maximum production. Plant after all danger of frost has past. *Do not* plant too soon! If the soil has not warmed sufficiently, the seeds will rot in the ground before they germinate. For an earlier crop, place black plastic over the row one week before planting. Slit the plastic with an X mark every 6 inches and plant 2 seeds in each opening. Make sure the soil underneath the plastic is thoroughly tilled. Use Rotenone or pyrethrum to control Mexican bean beetles. Avoid overhead watering and *do not* handle plants when they are wet.

Pole Beans - Till an area 4 feet by 4 feet. Incorporate compost into the soil and cover the bed with black plastic. Make a teepee out of 3 to 4 poles and stick into the bed. Cut a circle of plastic out around each pole. Plant 6 to 8 seeds around each pole, thinning to 3 plants per pole. Use a soaker hose to water the bed.

BLUE LAKE BUSH 55 days - One of the most popular varieties of snap bean grown today! The pods are 5½ to 6½ inches long, and have white seeds. Has both excellent flavor and texture!

BOUNTIFUL 46 days - An early bush bean that produces a very large crop! The beans are stringless, broad, straight, and 6 to 7 inches long. The plants grow 16 to 18 inches tall and have light green foliage. Good home garden variety for canning or freezing, that was first introduced in 1897.

CONTENDER 50 days - An old favorite first introduced in 1949. The dark green pods are oval in shape and stringless. A very heavy producer with disease resistance to common mosaic virus, NY 15 bean virus and greasy pod virus. The plants grow 15 to 20 inches high, and do well in the summer heat. We highly recommend this bean if you have had trouble growing a good bean crop in the past.

KENTUCKY WONDER BUSH (White Seeded) 60 days - All the great taste of KENTUCKY WONDER pole in a bush plant! Very tender, stringless pods are round and 8 inches long. Produces over a long period. Excellent flavor and quality. Popular home garden variety since the late 1800's. Our favorite bean!

PROVIDER 53 days - First introduced in South Carolina during 1965. A very heavy yielder of straight, green, 5 to 6 inch, round beans. Excellent quality bean for either fresh use or canning. Takes the heat and keeps on producing!

ROMANO, BUSH 63 days - All the flavor of a romano bean in a bush plant! The wide, flat pods are medium green, stringless and 5 to 6 inches long, on plants that grow 15 to 20 inches tall. A great home garden variety. Very meaty with excellent old fashioned flavor!

TENDERGREEN IMPROVED 53 days - "All American Selection" winner in 1933. The strong, upright plants grow 16 to 20 inches high, and produce an abundant crop of 5 to 7 inch, straight, green, meaty pods. An excellent bean for fresh use or for canning!

TOP CROP 51 days - "All American Selection" winner in 1950. Early producer of fine quality, medium green, straight, stringless 6 to 7 inch beans, on strong, upright plants, that grow 18 to 24 inches. A very heavy yielding variety!

BLUE LAKE POLE 70 days – Straight, stringless, dark green beans grow on tall 6- 7 foot vines. A consistent producer of quality pods. Excellent for freezing, soups, or canning. A favorite for generations.

ROMANO POLE BEAN 70 days - This old reliable variety has been a favorite for generations. The 6 foot vines produce wide-podded beans with a distinct flavor. For a continuous harvest, pick the delicious, stringless beans often!

SCARLET RUNNER POLE BEAN (*Phaseolus coccineus*) 70 days - This heirloom variety was first grown in the 1600's, but introduced to the United States in the 1800's. Large clusters of bright red flowers abound on large, 10 foot vines. Pick the 12 inch pods when young for best flavor. A favorite of hummingbirds!

FORDHOOK BUSH LIMA 75 days - This old variety was first introduced in 1917, and still remains a heavy producer of high quality beans today. The large, all purpose limas have pods that contain 4 to 5 fat, delicious beans! Our favorite lima!

FLORIDA SPECKLED BUTTER POLE LIMA BEAN 85 days - This very popular butter bean was first introduced in the 1840's. The tall, 10 foot vines bear pods in clusters. A wonderful buff colored bean with maroon speckles. Does well in hot, humid weather!

HEIRLOOM CORN

COUNTRY GENTLEMAN 95 days - Old fashioned shoe peg variety first introduced in 1890. The 7 foot stalks yield irregularly spaced, 7 inch ears of white kernels. A good canner. It makes the best creamed corn ever, but also excellent on the cob!

INDIAN CORN 100 days - Very productive ornamental corn. Strong, 6 to 8 foot tall stalks have large decorative ears. A rainbow of different color combinations! Excellent for fall decorations, and is easy to grow!

TRUCKER'S FAVORITE YELLOW 100 days - Yellow dent corn that can be eaten fresh as roasting ears. The stalks grow 8 to 9 feet, and have 8-10 inch ears with 14-18 rows of kernels. The dried kernels can be ground for flour or used as livestock feed.

HEIRLOOM CUCUMBERS

Soil pH 5.5 to 6.5 - Plant outside 1 to 2 weeks after the last spring frost. We recommend growing cucumbers on a trellis, for ease of harvesting and more thorough pest control. Plant 2-3 seeds every 8 to 12 inches along the trellis. When the seeds sprout, thin to one plant every 8 to 12 inches. As the plants grow, they will need help at first guiding them up the trellis. Harvest the cucumbers often and do not let the cucumbers get too big, as this will slow up future productivity of the plant. Cucumbers like plenty of sun and water. Avoid wetting the plants, if possible, when watering. If cucumber beetles are a problem in your area, Rotenone may be dusted on the plants to control them. Once a cucumber plant starts to wilt from a bacterial infection, remove the infected plant immediately. DO NOT put the diseased plant in your compost pile.

ARMENIAN (*Cucumis melo*) 50-75 days – These mild flavored, light green, heavily ribbed fruits grow 24-36", and will twist and turn if allowed to grow on the ground, straight if grown on trellis. Best if picked when 12-18 inches long.

HOMEMADE PICKLES (*Cucumis sativus*) 55 days - Excellent variety for pickling! The semi-bush type plants produce solid, crisp, small white spined, 5½ inch fruits. Pick regularly to maintain production.

JAPANESE CLIMBING 60 days - A Japanese favorite first introduced to the U.S. in 1892. The crunchy, 8x3 inch, light green fruits are good for fresh eating or pickling. Keep the vines well picked for a continuous harvest all season long.

***LEMON CUCUMBER** (*Cucumis sativus*) 65 days - This heirloom variety was first introduced in 1894. The small, lemon shaped cucumbers are pale yellow when mature, with mild, crisp, white flesh. Very unique!!

MEXICAN SOUR GHERKIN (*Melothria scabra*) 65 days - This tasty cuke may become your favorite! The 1-2 inch watermelon-shaped fruits have good cucumber flavor with a slight taste of sour, homemade pickles. Expect a large crop from this heirloom.

***MUNCHER** (*Cucumis sativus*) 59-65 days – This prolific variety bears smooth, medium green, 9 inch fruits on strong, vigorous vines. The tender cukes are burpless and never bitter.

NATIONAL PICKLING (*Cucumis sativus*) 55 days - This very productive variety has dark green skin with black spines. Is small, thick and blunt ended when young. Makes great pickles!

***POINSETT 76** (*Cucumis sativus*) 68 days - The dark green fruit with white spines grow 7 to 9 inches long and 2 to 3 inches in diameter. A hardy variety, very popular in the south

***SPACEMASTER 80** (*Cucumis sativus*) 57-64 days - If your garden is short on space, this variety is a good choice for you. The dwarf, 18-24 inch vines produce large, 7-9 inch non-bitter fruits. A heavy yielder that thrives in full sun. Perfect for container gardening.

***STRAIGHT EIGHT** (*Cucumis sativus*) 65 days - This "All American Selection" in 1935 has smooth, straight, dark green, 8 inch fruits. A very prolific home garden variety!

SUYO LONG 60-70 days - This Chinese variety produces ribbed, dark green skin with heavy white spines. The long (10 – 18 inch) thin fruits are almost seedless, non-bitter, and burpless. This heat resistant variety is very prolific, as well as crisp and tender, and should be trellised or staked.

***TENDERGREEN BURPLESS** (*Cucumis sativus*) 55-65 days – The long, 8 -10 inch, thin, dark green fruits are non-bitter, acid free and burpless! Resistant to downy mildew and powdery mildew,

OKRA

Soil pH 6.0 to 6.5 - Sow okra seeds outside in spring, after all danger of frost has passed when the soil temperature has reached 70F. Sow 2 to 3 seeds every 12 inches, eventually thinning to one plant every foot. Okra can be planted in a wide, 3 to 4 foot row, for maximum production in a small area. Harvest the pods when they reach a size of 2 to 4 inches.

***CLEMSON SPINELESS** 60 days - This "All American Selection" winner was first introduced in 1939. The 4 foot plants produce ample amounts of dark green, high quality pods. Best picked when pods are 2 1/2 to 3 inches long. The most popular okra grown in the U.S. today!

COWHORN 60 days - These huge 6 to 7 foot plants abound with long, slender, ribbed, spined, 10 inch curved pods. This very productive variety makes an excellent choice for home gardens. Old variety brought back after a long absence!

***RED BURGANDY** 60 days – These attractive 4 foot plants yield delicious, tender, 6 to 8 inch burgundy pods! Has green leaves, but burgundy stems, branches and leaf ribs. A unique choice for your garden!

SOUTHERN PEAS

CALIFORNIA BLACK EYE PEA 65 days - This all time southern favorite can be used either green in the summer or dried in the winter. This heavy yielding, sweet flavored variety has 6 to 7 inch, well filled pods.

***PINKEYE / PURPLE HULL** 75 days - This popular variety has white peas with small purple "eyes". A very vigorous grower that's heavy yielding. Freezes well!

***TENNESSEE WHITE CROWDER** 65-100 days - A vining variety with a long blossom period. The well-filled pods are dark green when mature. Delicious, cream pea flavor. A good, all purpose variety that's a favorite of many.

HEIRLOOM EVERBEARING SPINACH

NEW ZEALAND SPINACH *Tetragonia Expansa* 55-70 days - Not a true spinach, but similar in flavor and use. A European favorite since the 1770's! The large plants have small fleshy green leaves that are sweet and tasty. This spinach is slow to germinate; soaking the seeds in water for 24 hours before planting will hasten germination. This one thrives in hot weather! Pick the top leaves for fresh greens all summer!

***RED MALABAR** *Basella rubra* 50-70 days - A nice alternative to "true" spinach when the weather gets too hot. A perennial from India, this heat-loving, branching climber has red leaf veins and stems. Cut the sprouts to eat raw in salads or sautee` lightly for greens. Used as a thickener in the Orient, and also in place of okra in the South. Regrows rapidly. A green variety of this also usually available!

HEIRLOOM PUMPKINS and SQUASH

BIG MAX PUMPKIN (*Cucurbita maxima*) 120 days -Huge pumpkins grow to 100 pounds or more! The fruits are nearly round, with slightly rough, red-orange skin. The flesh is a bright yellow-orange color and is 3 to 4 inches thick. Great for pies and canning, as well as mammoth Jack-O-Lanterns! Kids love growing them!

CUSHAW, GREEN STRIPED (*Cucurbita mixta*) 75-115 days- An old favorite from the Caribbean that dates back to pre-1893. The 12-15 pound fruits have a hard, thin, green and white mottled rind. The sweet, pale yellow flesh is good for pies or canning. Very prolific.

JACK BE LITTLE (*Cucurbita pepo*) 90 days - These miniature pumpkins are great for decorating! The 2"x 3" pumpkins are dark orange in color, and tiny enough to fit in the palm of your hand! Grow your own unique Thanksgiving decorations this year!

***BUTTERCUP** (*Cucurbita maxima*) 100 days - This old heirloom was first introduced in 1920, and many believe this is still the best tasting winter squash! The dark green, turban shaped fruit has thick, dry, orange flesh, and average 4 to 5 pounds each. Simply delicious!

***BUTTERNUT** (*Cucurbita moschata*) 90 days - This all time favorite is a light tan color, with rich golden-orange flesh. The bottle shaped fruit average 3 to 5 pounds each, and are great tasting! A good variety for winter storage!

***SPAGHETTI** (*Cucurbita pepo*) 100 days- This unusual variety is filled with strands of squash similar to spaghetti! To serve, simply bake, then scoop the strands out, and serve just like pasta. Unique!

TURK'S TURBAN (*Cucurbita maxima*) 90-100 days - Highly decorative and colorful, this heirloom dates back to pre-1800. The 5-8 pound fruits have a distinctive cap on top and are visually appealing with its beautiful red, orange and yellow markings. Fair table quality; excellent for autumn displays.

HEIRLOOM SUMMER SQUASH

***BLACK BEAUTY SQUASH** 60 days - This heirloom variety was first introduced to U.S. markets in the 1920's. The semi-upright plants produce a heavy crop of blocky, dark green/black fruits, with a creamy, white interior. Excellent all purpose zucchini.

***BLACK ZUCCHINI** (*Cucurbita pepo*) 45 days - This old variety was first introduced in 1931. The fruits are dark green-black in color with crisp, fine-textured green/white flesh. Best picked when 6 to 8 inches long. These vigorous bush plants will produce all summer long!

CASERTA SQUASH 50-57 days - An All-American Selection in 1949, this early variety promises a bumper crop of green-striped fruits with a creamy-white interior. The mild flavor makes it wonderful when fried or used in casseroles. A cut-leaf, semi-open bush plant.

***DARK GREEN ZUCCHINI** (*Cucurbita pepo*) 55 days - This variety was first introduced in 1931, and is still one of our most popular squash! The bush plants take up less room in the garden, while still producing plenty of straight, smooth, dark green mottled fruit with green-white interiors. A very prolific variety that has excellent taste!

***GREY ZUCCHINI** (*Cucurbita pepo*) 48 days - This semi-bush plant is an excellent home garden variety! The green skinned fruit, flecked with grey color, has a delicious flavor. This is a heavy yielding variety that produces over a long period.

***WHITE PATTY PAN** (*Cucurbita pepo*) 55 days - A very prolific early squash. The flat, 7 inch fruit has deeply scalloped edges and tender white flesh. This variety was used by the North American Indian tribes before the European settlers arrived!

***YELLOW CROOKNECK** (*Cucurbita pepo*) 60 days - This old variety has a distinctive buttery flavor and is deep yellow in color, with a curved neck and plump blossom end. For a continuous harvest all summer long, pick when the squash are 6 inches long. Simply delicious!

HEIRLOOM SWEET PEPPERS

***CALIFORNIA WONDER** 75 days - Our select strain of this popular bell pepper! This large, thick walled, juicy, sweet pepper is the most popular variety grown in the United States today! A delicious, 4 inch pepper that starts out green when young, turning a bright red at maturity. Delicious!

***CALIFORNIA WONDER GOLD PEPPER** 72 days - Similar to California Wonder pepper, except the fruits ripen to a bright yellow-gold color. The beautifully colored 4 inch fruits weigh 6 ounces each, and grow on plants that are 24 to 30 inches tall. Wonderful in salads or in stir-fry!

***CALIFORNIA WONDER PURPLE PEPPER** 72 days - Similar to California Wonder pepper, except the fruits mature to an unusual dark purple color. The plants grow 24 to 30 inches tall, and bear fruits that are thick walled and weigh about 6 ounces each. For something a little different, grow some this year! A real eye catcher in salads!ry!

***CORNO DI TORO ROSSO (aka COWHORN)** 75-100 days - A very attractive Italian heirloom that bears long, 8-10 inch, curved fruit in the shape of a bull's horn. The mildly flavored peppers can be harvested green for frying, or let sweeten on the vine until they've ripened to a rich red color.

***KEYSTONE GIANT** 78 days - These vigorous 30 inch plants grow plenty of big, blocky 5 inch fruits. A variety known for its thick, dark green flesh, as well as its heavy yields! Tasty!

***KING OF THE NORTH** 65 days - This green pepper is great for short seasoned areas! The dark green fruit is blocky shaped and thick walled, having 3 lobes. A good choice for stuffing or eating!

***ORANGE BELL** 85 days – Crunchy and sweet, this 4x3 inch blocky pepper is excellent for stir-frys or eaten fresh. Delightful on relish trays and salads. Very prolific and a good choice for freezing.

***PIMENTO** 65-90 days – This heavy yielder is great for canning. The upright 2½ foot plants yield smooth 3 x 2½" heart shaped fruits. Very sweet when bright red at maturity.

***RED CHERRY SWEET** 70-80 days - This heirloom has been favored by growers since 1860, and with good reason. The 2 foot, bushy plants will produce a heavy crop of cherry-shaped 1 x 1½ " fruits. The bite-sized peppers are perfect for pickling. The thin-skinned fruits mature to a deep-crimson color.

***SWEET BANANA** 65 days - These banana shaped fruits are wonderful either in salads or frying! The 6 inch peppers are sweet and mild, growing on plants that average 20 inches high. Pick early when yellow or let mature to a deep red color. One of our best sellers!

***YOLO WONDER** 75 days - A larger and more mosaic resistant variety than the California Wonder pepper. The 2 foot plants grow thick walled peppers that mature to a beautiful red color, with dense foliage to help protect against sun scald. A good choice!

HEIRLOOM HOT PEPPERS

***ANAHEIM CHILI** 70-90 days – Heavy bearing 2-2½ foot plants bear plenty of medium-thick fleshed fruits. The 8 x 1½" peppers are moderately pungent and mature to a beautiful red color. Great for drying or frying.

***ANCHO** 88-150 days – A favorite Mexican variety! Fat, heart shaped 4 x 3" fruits mature to a red/brown color and are extremely wrinkled when dry. The mildly hot, distinctive flavor makes this the choice of many.

***CARIBBEAN RED** 75-100 days - Also known as Habanero Red. Similar in taste and size to Habanero only this variety ripens to a shiny, brilliant red color. An extremely hot variety that's very prolific. Kick up your next batch of salsa!

***CAYENNE THICK** 75 days - This high yielding variety has the traditional hot, pungent flavor associated with cayennes. The long, red, 5 inch pods are thick-walled and are a good choice for drying.

***CHILTEPIN** 80-95 days - A terrific variety that can be found occasionally growing wild in the southwestern U.S. These small, 1 foot plants have plenty of tiny ¼-½", very hot fruits. A great choice for container growing!

***CUBANELLE** 70 days - A six inch, mildly flavored pepper that is a yellow-green in color, changing to a beautiful, deep red color at maturity. This 3 lobed pepper tapers to a blunt end, and has slightly irregular, thick flesh. An excellent choice for cooking!

***HABANERO** 90-100 days - This is the hottest pepper you'll ever grow! The plants grow 36 inches and are filled with small lantern shaped fruit. The thin, green flesh turns golden-orange when ripe. 1,000 times hotter than Jalapeno!! Great in hot sauces! A warm soil temperature is needed for the seeds to germinate.

***HOT BANANA** 65-85 days - This mildly hot variety is a good choice for stuffing or pickling. The long, tapered, 6-8 inch, yellow fruits have good flavor and is the perfect choice for frying with onions.

***HUNGARIAN HOT WAX** 58-85 days - A versatile pepper - good for both fresh use and canning! The medium hot, 8 x 1½", yellow fruits grow on strong 2 foot plants. A good choice for cooler locations.

***JALAPENO** 70 days - A very popular hot pepper, used often in Mexican cuisine. The green, sausage shaped fruits are abundant on these 24-36 inch plants. Excellent variety for pickling!

***JALAPENO, TAM** (Mild) 67-73 days - Known as the "gringo pepper", this variety has only ¼ – ½ the heat as a regular jalapeno. A prolific producer that yields a heavy crop suitable for eating raw or pickling. Good choice for those wanting more flavor and less heat. Height – 31 inches.

***LARGE HOT CHERRY** 85 days - A popular pepper for pickling or canning! These fiery hot, one inch, globe shaped fruits appear on 2 foot plants. They start out green, turning a bright red color at maturity. A very productive pepper plant!

***LONG RED CAYENNE** 75 days - These fiery hot, 5 inch peppers are long, thin, curved and wrinkled. They first appear a waxy green color, turning crimson at maturity. Choose this variety for crushed red peppers!!

MULATO ISLENO PEPPER 70-90 days - This Mexican variety is a good choice for stuffing as rellenos. The fat, 6x3 inch peppers are mild and chewy, with a very distinctive flavor. The fruits mature to a deep red/black color if left on the vines. May also be used dried.

***RED CHILI** 80 days - An excellent variety for drying! Fruits abound on these 20 inch plants, each growing a very hot, 1.5 inches! A deep red colored pepper, that's well known for its heat! Very hot!

***SCOTCH BONNET, YELLOW** 70-90 days – A Jamaican favorite! The very pungent, mushroom shaped fruit mature from green to a deep yellow color. Very similar to Habanero, but with a shorter growing season. This is one hot pepper!

***SERRANO** 75-90 days - Very hot, small, candle- flame shaped fruit appear on this prolific variety! The fruits start out green, turning red-orange at maturity, and grow on 2 to 3 foot plants. A very popular Mexican variety of hot pepper!

***TABASCO** 80 days - This very hot Mexican variety is the one we love for hot sauces! The fruits grow almost erect off the branches and start out a yellow/green color, ending up red. Everyone's favorite!

***TEPIN** 90 days – A wild variety native to the southwest U.S. and South America, the small pea-sized fruit are red and very pungent. Also known as “Bird Pepper” since it is the favorite food of mocking birds! 1 to 1½ foot plants.

HEIRLOOM EGGPLANTS

***BLACK BEAUTY** 83 days - A delicious variety that grows 24 to 30 inches high, and produces 4 to 6 purplish-black, smooth, 7 inch fruit. The fruits are tender and tasty, and retain their color well. A high quality eggplant that was popular with generations of backyard gardeners!

***ROSA BIANCA** 70-90 days – A lovely Italian heirloom that bears medium sized, 8 inch, oval fruits. The pink/lavender colored fruits are occasionally shaded with a cream color. Always sweet and mild, with no bitterness.

CANTALOUPE - MUSKMELONS - HONEY DEWS

CRENSHAW 107 days - This gourmet melon is known for its sweet taste! The skin color of the crenshaw is yellow green, with salmon colored flesh, and grows 6 to 10 pounds. Delicious!

DELICIOUS 51 83 days - These almost perfectly round, 6 inch melons have tasty, bright, salmon colored flesh, and has some tolerance to Fusarium wilt. An excellent muskmelon for the home garden!

HONEYDEW GREEN FLESH 105-115 days – The smooth, creamy white rind yields luscious, thick green flesh inside of it. The very high sugar content of this variety makes it one of the sweetest!

MINNESOTA MIDGET 60-100 days – If harvest time and space has been a problem for you, then this is the melon to try! These round, 12" melons are sweet and juicy and grow on shorter vines than other varieties. A great choice for Northern gardeners. The perfect treat after a hard days work!

HEIRLOOM WATERMELONS

***BLACK DIAMOND** 90 days - The almost perfectly round, large melons grow 30 to 50 pounds, and have sweet, firm, bright red flesh with a dark green-blue rind, growing on large, vigorous vines. A very popular variety in the south!

BUSH SUGAR BABY 75-80 days - The dwarf vines on this variety grow only 3-3½ feet long, taking up less growing space in the garden. The sweet, scarlet flesh is juicy and firm. Most plants will produce 2, round/oval 9" fruits, each weighing between 8-12 pounds.

***CHARLESTON GRAY** 85 days - An excellent tasting watermelon with deep red, crisp flesh and green-gray rind with fine, darker green veins. A tasty variety of melon that weighs 30 to 35 pounds. Delicious!

***CRIMSON SWEET** 80-95 days - A high sugar variety that's always sweet and juicy. The blocky, 25 pound fruits have a tough, green striped rind, deep red flesh, and few seeds. Always a favorite at Farmer's Markets.

***SUGAR BABY** 79 days - An "icebox" variety that weighs only 6 to 10 pounds - perfect for storing in the refrigerator! The rind is green with darker green stripes, while the flesh is a luscious red color with excellent flavor! An earlier maturing variety. Try some!

What is an "heirloom"? The definition is open to dispute. But the term is usually applied to fruit, flower or vegetables varieties that were being grown before World War II.

Back then, what we now call "organic gardening," based on manure and mulch, was standard practice for home gardeners, who accepted risk and variation from weather and disease just as farmers had to.

From the 1950s to the 1970s, hybrids dominated the commercial vegetable market, and the older varieties became hard to find until a growing interest in cooking and food sparked a resurgence of the more flavorful heirlooms.

Heirloom varieties are open-pollinated--meaning that unlike hybrids, seeds you collect from one year will produce plants with most of the characteristics of the parent plant. And that's key to their survival.

Many heirloom varieties were preserved by home gardeners who saved seed from their family gardens from year to year. Other seeds travelled around the world in the pockets or letters of immigrants, which is why, though the tomato evolved in Central America, we have varieties from Russia, Italy, Japan, France, Germany and Kentucky.

But many other heirlooms are commercially-bred varieties from the seed catalogs of the 19th and early 20th Centuries. Since W. Atlee Burpee & Co. was founded in 1876, the name "Burpee" turns up in many an heirloom vegetable catalog.

So if heirloom varieties are so wonderful, why aren't all vegetables like that? Breeders didn't just wipe out old varieties out of sheer perverseness. They developed hybrids for two main reasons: To make large-scale commercial production and distribution of vegetables easier and more profitable, and to make growing vegetables less labor-intensive and more sure-fire for home gardeners who may not have been as sure of their skills as their farmer ancestors.

Flavor may not have been the highest priority for 20th Century breeders, but they created hybrids with a number of useful qualities.

Disease resistance: Many vegetables are plagued by diseases that can wipe out a crop. Hybrids, especially tomatoes and corn, were bred that are resistant to a number of these diseases. When you see codes such as "VFF" or "VF1" in a seed catalog, they refer to diseases the variety was bred to fight off.

Higher yield: Many of the most flavorful heirlooms, such as the beloved 'Brandywine' tomato, don't produce a whole lot of fruit. Hybrids were developed to produce much larger crops per plant.

Uniformity: Commercial growers quickly learned that fruits and vegetables that looked funny wouldn't sell. Conformity was king. So hybrids were developed to have more consistent sizes, shapes and colors. Supermarket tomatoes all became red. Hybrids for the home garden came to reflect what consumers learned to expect at the supermarket.

Marketability: Fruits and vegetables that were all the same size to pack easily, didn't bruise much and didn't go bad quickly could be shipped longer distances. So hybrids made many fruits and vegetables available all over the country and often for many more months each year, even if they didn't taste like their ancestors.

Hybrid vigor: First-generation hybrids tend to grow more vigorously and produce more than plants of a selected variety whose genes have been relatively isolated for generations. But, such hybrids can only be produced commercially, which means you have to buy new seed every year instead of saving it.

Timing: Determinate tomato hybrids--those that grow to a certain point, stop, and produce all their fruit at once--can be picked with big machines, rather than by workers who go out again and again to hand-pick whatever fruits are ripe. That greatly reduced the cost of canned tomatoes.

Today, breeders are trying to find the best of both worlds, crossing modern hybrids with older, more flavorful heirlooms to make old-style taste part of the equation along with disease resistance, consistency and higher yields. There are a number of hybrid versions of 'Brandywine,' for example.

These new hybrids are less risky, but they also aren't open-pollinated, so you won't get consistent results by saving the seed.

So should you choose heirlooms or hybrids? It's a polarizing question. Some gardeners believe strongly that the flavor of heirlooms is so superior that no growing season should be wasted on anything else. Others feel it's their responsibility to grow heirlooms in order to preserve diversity in food crops so that we don't lose valuable genetic variation we might need down the road. And some gardeners are determined to taste as many different flavors of tomato as they can in a lifetime.

But other gardeners are focused on results. They want what they're used to. They place the highest priority on getting a lot of predictable tomatoes just when they expect them with as few problems as possible. For them, modern hybrids seem a better bet.

Fortunately, there's plenty of middle ground. You can choose one dependable, disease-resistant hybrid variety as a fail-safe and take a greater chance on two or three heirlooms each year. Or you can add one of the new hybrids derived from popular heirlooms into the mix. If you're growing tomatoes in containers, it might be wise to choose a dwarf, determinate hybrid variety.

A diversity of choices for the garden is as good a thing as diversity in the gene pool.

***= Available as a transplants during appropriate planting season at**

Rainbow Gardens #1

2585 Thousand Oaks

San Antonio, Texas 78232-4101

www.rainbowgardns.biz