



### Garden Tips: Heirloom Veggies

Many of you are probably familiar with the term “heirloom,” as it relates to plant varieties. There is no official definition for this term, but in general, gardeners use it to describe varieties that have:

1. Been in existence for at least 50 years
2. Been saved historically by families, rather than seed companies
3. Seeds that can be saved to produce the same crop

Heirloom crops are open pollinated, meaning that they have been pollinated in natural conditions, by wind, birds, or insects. Hybrids, on the other hand, are created under scientific conditions, by crossing varieties to combine their positive attributes. Heirloom crops may lack disease resistance, productivity, or uniformity of hybrid crops. However, heirlooms often offer unique shapes and colors, along with interesting flavors and stories that have been passed along through the years.

Heirloom tomatoes have made a recent comeback and you may know some of those varieties, like Brandywine, Green Zebra, or Black Cherry. The names of heirloom vegetables can be quite colorful! Some of them almost tell their own story, like Mortgage Lifter, Arkansas Traveler, and Aunt Ruby’s German Green.

Many other types of heirloom vegetables are available. Here are some of our favorites:

*Rattlesnake Bean:* Someone evidently thought that the distinctive purple markings on these green pole beans look like the pattern on a rattlesnake. We like these beans because they produce well, and hold their sweet and tender qualities even if you can’t get out to pick them every other day.

*Costata Romanesca Zucchini:* This zucchini fares well throughout the season, vining along the ground when old sections of the plant die back. It’s not a space-saver, but the pretty green striped and mottled zucchini with their smooth texture and nutty flavor make it worth putting in at least one plant!

*Chioggia Beet:* This beautiful and tasty beet is candy striped white and pink on the inside. Slightly less uniform than a hybrid beet, it’s colorful and flavorful enough that we grow it anyway.

*French Breakfast Radish:* An elongated oval shape with a red top and white tip make these radishes distinctive. They are quick to grow, sweet and spicy, and evidently favored for breakfast in France!

*Red Russian Kale:* A less productive but delicious and tender type of kale. The smooth lobed leaves attract flea beetles more than traditional kale, which makes this a difficult variety to grow on production farms. But a few plants in a home garden can be lovely and delicious! Soft green leaves with purple stems.

*Dragon Langerie Bean:* This pale yellow bush bean grows flat like a Romano. It is mild and sweet, and productive for a yellow bean. It’s got purple flecking like the rattlesnake bean.

*Lemon Cucumber:* Another variety not well-suited for production farms, this lemon-yellow cucumber is fun in a home garden. It produces slightly oblong – but almost round – cucumbers, with sweet flavor and crispy texture.

*Burgundy Okra:* This gorgeous red variety sports hibiscus-like flowers while producing rose-colored okra. Not as productive as other varieties of okra, but a beautiful flowering plant for the garden, with edible okra pods as a side benefit.