

Try Some New Vegetables, Or Maybe Some Old Ones!



Written by: Kevin Milaeger
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Its seed catalog time! What an enjoyable pastime for a cold winter evening. I ready myself with some sticky notes, a pen, and my tablet. Lots of information to digest. Used to be the catalogs would start arriving after January 1. Now I receive at least a couple before Thanksgiving, but I don't get around to reading them until the Christmas season is over and the tree is down. I'm looking especially for varieties that are new to us, or things we haven't tried in some years. The final choices will be offered in our "**Vintage Veggie**" program. This began some years ago to trial heirloom varieties, which were then experiencing a resurgence. Now it has evolved and includes anything that looks interesting, old or new. We only grow maybe 100-150 of each, and they're available for a limited time starting in mid-May. This year they're scheduled for May 16th, and will continue for about ten days or until we're sold out. Lots of our customers have come to look forward for this offering, as inquisitive gardeners always want to try something new.

Photo courtesy of Baker Creek
Heirloom/rareseeds.com



'Habanada' (savory)

Photo courtesy of IvyGarth



'Beaver Dam' (savory)

When I start this enjoyable task, I usually don't have a specific goal. It all depends on what's to be found. But sometimes a goal forms itself. If I find a lot of interesting new cherry tomatoes, for example, we might end up offering a dozen or so of them, and doing a little trial in our garden, comparing them. This year I found a lot of interesting peppers. A good many of them are in a category that I made up—savory peppers. That is, not hot, but not sweet either. Some of these have a small amount of heat, maybe under 1,000 scoville units (jalapeño peppers range from 2,500 to 6,000.) Others have no heat at all, but are definitely not sweet, like a bell pepper. They have a unique flavor, or tanginess that is better tasted than described. One of these is the heatless habanero called 'Habanada.' It carries the smoky habanero flavor but none of the extreme heat of its relatives (250,000 scoville units.) Another interesting one is 'Beaver Dam.' Originating right here in Wisconsin, this is a 5" tapered bell that turns red when ripe. It has a very mild scoville rating, 500-1,000. The heat of a pepper can vary for at least two reasons, growing temperature and moisture level. Heat increases during a hot dry summer, and we sometimes have those. If you irrigate regularly you can overcome the water part, but we have no control over the temperature. This is why the heat of peppers varies from year to

year, and even during one growing season. Another interesting newcomer is from Japan—‘Murasaki Purple.’ The horn shaped fruit looks like a hot pepper, but it is not. The fruits start out green and turn purple for most of the growing season, finishing red when fully ripe, but they can be eaten when purple. Even the foliage has a purple cast. We hope you find something of interest on this year’s list—[here is a link](#). Keep in mind this is what we are planning on offering. Sometimes the seed companies don’t ship the seed, and sometimes the seeds don’t germinate, or do so poorly, so there could be a few varieties that don’t make it to our lot.

Photo courtesy of Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds/rareseeds.com



'Murasaki Purple'
(savory)

Photo courtesy of Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds/rareseeds.com



'Santa Fe Grande'
(savory)

In the tomato category you will see a relatively new designation called “heirloom marriage.” Heirloom variety enthusiasts have much to choose from these days, and more older varieties continue to be discovered. What some breeders have done is to cross two heirloom varieties, hoping to create something that inherits the best traits of both heirloom parents. Sometimes they take an heirloom variety and cross it with a hybrid that has very desirable traits. Both groups fall loosely into this new category of “heirloom marriages.” I welcome the

efforts of these breeders, but ultimately the home gardeners will have the final say about whether their efforts were successful. One such tomato this year is 'Cherokee Carbon,' a creation featuring two well-known heirlooms—'Cherokee Purple' and 'Carbon,' both "black" varieties. Of course, they aren't truly black colored but they are distinctly darker than typical tomatoes. Another that looks promising to me is 'Red Rose.' The parents are the famous 'Brandywine' and an old hybrid called 'Rutgers.' I'm sure some of you grew 'Rutgers' years ago. I remember selling it in the 1960's.

Photo courtesy of IvyGarth



**'Cherokee
Purple'**

Photo courtesy of Baker
Creek Heirloom
Seeds/rareseeds.com



**'Cherokee
Carbon'**

Photo courtesy of Baker
Creek Heirloom
Seeds/rareseeds.com



'Carbon'

One thing I've noticed in the past few years is that some older, familiar varieties now have the word "plus" added to their names. 'Early Girl Plus,' for example. I wrote to two of the major seed companies and asked them about this change. Both were somewhat vague, but they said it meant the variety was improved, sometimes in several ways. Improved production, greater disease resistance, improved vigor, that sort of thing. Apparently its different with every variety. This does not mean they are genetically modified (GMO) seeds. For those of you who are concerned about this, you can be assured that its not a problem with any seed or plants offered by anyone in the USA. The seed simply is not available to any

greenhouse or garden center. It seems to be confined to large farmers, to what crops I do not know. But I know nothing of the sort will turn up at any farmers market or any grocery store. Anyway, the “plus” designation is here to stay, and I’ve been informed that the original varieties will soon be obsolete.

Photo courtesy of harriseseeds.com



'Bendida'

Photo courtesy of Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds/rareseeds.com



'Abe Lincoln'

Another worthwhile improvement is that we have several tomato varieties on our VV list that are resistant to early blight. This is the disease that has plagued many of us in our part of the world, myself included. It usually begins sometime in July, with the bottom leaves turning yellow, and working its way up the plant until the entire plant is consumed. With this disease we can often harvest the first fruit set, but it gets dicey after that, and the plants eventually have to be destroyed. Late blight is much more severe but is less common in our area. Two blight resistant varieties have caught my eye. ‘Bellerose Hybrid’ is a smaller pink beefsteak that’s relatively early—70 days from transplant. That’s early for a beefsteak. Another is ‘Bendida Hybrid,’ a semi-determinate, so maybe easier to control. Its color is deep yellow/orange. Of course terms like “blight resistant” are no

guarantee, but I definitely think they are worth considering. Here's to a successful garden in 2024!

Please email me (kevin@milaegers.com) with your questions and comments!

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