

### The Seeds of History



You might think I was talking about your family history or ancestry.com. In a way, I am. Heirloom seeds are just as diverse as our diverse historical roots. According to John Torgrimson, executive director of Seed Savers Exchange, “Every seed has a story.”

“New Zealand” spinach (*Tetragonia expansa*) growing in New Zealand was discovered by Captain James Cook. He fed the spinach to his crew to fight scurvy. The heirloom seeds tell stories as diverse as their genetics.

Here is an amazing tale. Eggplant originated in Sri Lanka and southern India. To this day it is considered the “king of vegetables.” China is the top producer in the world, followed by India. Thomas Jefferson was a fan of eggplant and was one of the earliest gardeners in the United States to introduce the vegetable at his Monticello gardens.

Gardening and history are married. Miss a step of history and lose our connection to the past. When you plant an heirloom garden, you might as well label it “living history.” In an heirloom garden, people have “manipulated” the journey these seeds have taken, by their own changes in their lives.

Sweet peppers came to this country with Guiseppe and Angella Nardello who left southern Italy in 1887 and ventured to the United States. The couple ended up living in Connecticut where they planted the pepper seeds from Italy. The seeds thrived. They named the pepper plants after their fourth son, “Jimmy Nardello.”

The famous bean seed named “Trail of Tears” was passed on from the Cherokee Indians in the mid-19th century. As the settler population grew in Georgia, the settlers were taking Native American lands and pushing the Native Americans further into the frontier.

## Extension Corner

Written by Linda Langelo

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The Cherokee Indians who once called Georgia and the land east of the Mississippi home, now named it the "Trail of Tears." The Cherokee Indians were forced into new a territory and many died from disease, hunger and exhaustion on the way to their new territory. The path to their new territory is aptly named "Trail of Tears."

One of the most popular tomato plant heirloom varieties is called "Brandywine." This tomato did not originate in 1885 with the Amish in Chester County, Pa. Its history goes back further to Frome, England. The gardener, William Iggulden, a fellow of the Royal Horticulture Society, discovered the pink tomato. This tomato was a mutation of another tomato called Mikado. The seed got into the hands of Johnson and Stokes Seed Company of Philadelphia, Pa. Johnson and Stokes Seed sent seed samples to a local farm owned by Thomas H. Brinton. Brinton planted the seed on trials on his farm. He named William Iggulden's pink tomato "Brandywine" because of the Brandywine River that ran by his home.

Reference: Weaver, William Woys (2012) "Heirloom Tomatoes A New Passion for Heritage Flavors," County Lines Online Magazine. Russ, K. and Bradshaw, D. "Heirloom Vegetables," Clemson University Extension, South Carolina.

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Holyoke Enterprise December 13, 2012

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