



## Popular Farmers' Market Heirloom Vegetables

**The popularity of heirlooms vegetables at farmers' markets and dinner tables is more established now than ever. Read about some of the best ones to bring to the farmers' market.**

By Andy Tomolonis

Funky Heirlooms If you're interested in moving beyond common vegetables (tomatoes, peppers and lettuce), try heirloom varieties of these more unusual choices:

\* Artichoke \* Leeks \* Chinese cabbage \* Endive \* Peanuts \* Parsnips \* Chicory \* Tomatillo \* Amaranth \* Salsify \* Okra \* Rhubarb \* Celeriac \* Crowder peas \* Rutabaga \* Sweet potatoes

Here's the Seeds!

Click here for a wealth of heirloom seed resources.

Did You Know ...

Hobby Farms Editor in Chief Karen Keb Acevedo was a keynote speaker at the Bakersville 8th Annual Spring Planting Festival. Heirloom vegetables are grabbing an increasing share of the space at farmers' markets due to superior flavor and the novelty of their often colorful hues.

A customer favorite is the Brandywine tomato. Its pinkish-red skin doesn't hold up well to being poked and squeezed by human hands, but buyers everywhere are aware of Brandywine's reputation as possibly the world's best-tasting tomato.

Growers are just as knowledgeable about Brandywine's lack of productivity and that the fruits sometimes split or appear misshapen. But the large, vigorous, potato-leaf vines are more disease resistant than other many heirlooms.

A more eye-catching tomato with a taste that rivals Brandywine, is Cherokee Purple, a plump and meaty, purplish-brown tomato with shoulders that stay green even when fruit is ripe.

"They're good looking and the flavor is outstanding," says Ryan Voiland, owner of Red Fire Organic Farm in Granby, Mass.

Voiland grows more than 300 varieties of vegetables, with at least 75 different tomatoes.

A few of his favorites: Striped German, a big, late-season tomato with yellow fruit that's marbled with streaks of crimson. Flavor is extremely sweet. Eva Purple Ball, a purplish-pink tomato from Germany. Salad-sized fruit are about two inches in diameter, and perfectly round and blemish free. Federle, a large, deep-red paste tomato shaped like a cow's horn pepper. Fruit reaches seven inches long and flavor is much better than other paste tomatoes.

What is an Heirloom?

Like the seeds, the term has been passed down for many years.

While it's not an official designation, most seed experts agree that to be classified as an heirloom, a variety must be open-pollinated and not be the quick result of deliberately crossing one variety with another. And when planted, the seeds that are harvested will be stable, showing all the basic characteristics of its parents.

Some plants called heirlooms today have been selectively pollinated and then stabilized, which means that seeds from the offspring are collected and planted, for several generations until the new plants retain the full characteristics of their parents.

These crosses eventually become open-pollinated varieties and can be called heirlooms if they've been successfully grown for more than 50 years.



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Voiland also likes heirloom Antohi Romanian pepper, a sweet, elongated frying pepper, and red- or green-leaf Deer's Tongue lettuce, which looks like a butterhead lettuce at its base, but the tops form a rosette of leaves shaped like deer's tongues.

"The flavor is excellent and the ribs have a tender crunch."

Another New England organic farmer, Bryan Connolly of Mansfield, Conn., takes pride in bringing heirlooms to market.

"They provide lots of color and eye-candy that you don't get in other varieties," he says.

One colorful combination he sells is a rainbow radish assortment.

He mixes red-and-round Champion radishes with violet-magenta Purple Plum radishes and torpedo-shaped red-and-white French Breakfast radishes in a single bunch.

It's a winning combination at the University of Connecticut farmers' market, he says.

About the Author: Andy Tomolonis is a gardener and freelance writer living in suburban Boston.

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This article contains excerpts from "A Taste of Yesterday" by Andy Tomolonis. It first appeared in Heirloom Farm, a recent issue of the Popular Farming Series. For an in-depth, detailed and full-color exploration of heirlooms, get a copy of Heirloom Farm online or in a farm supply store near you.