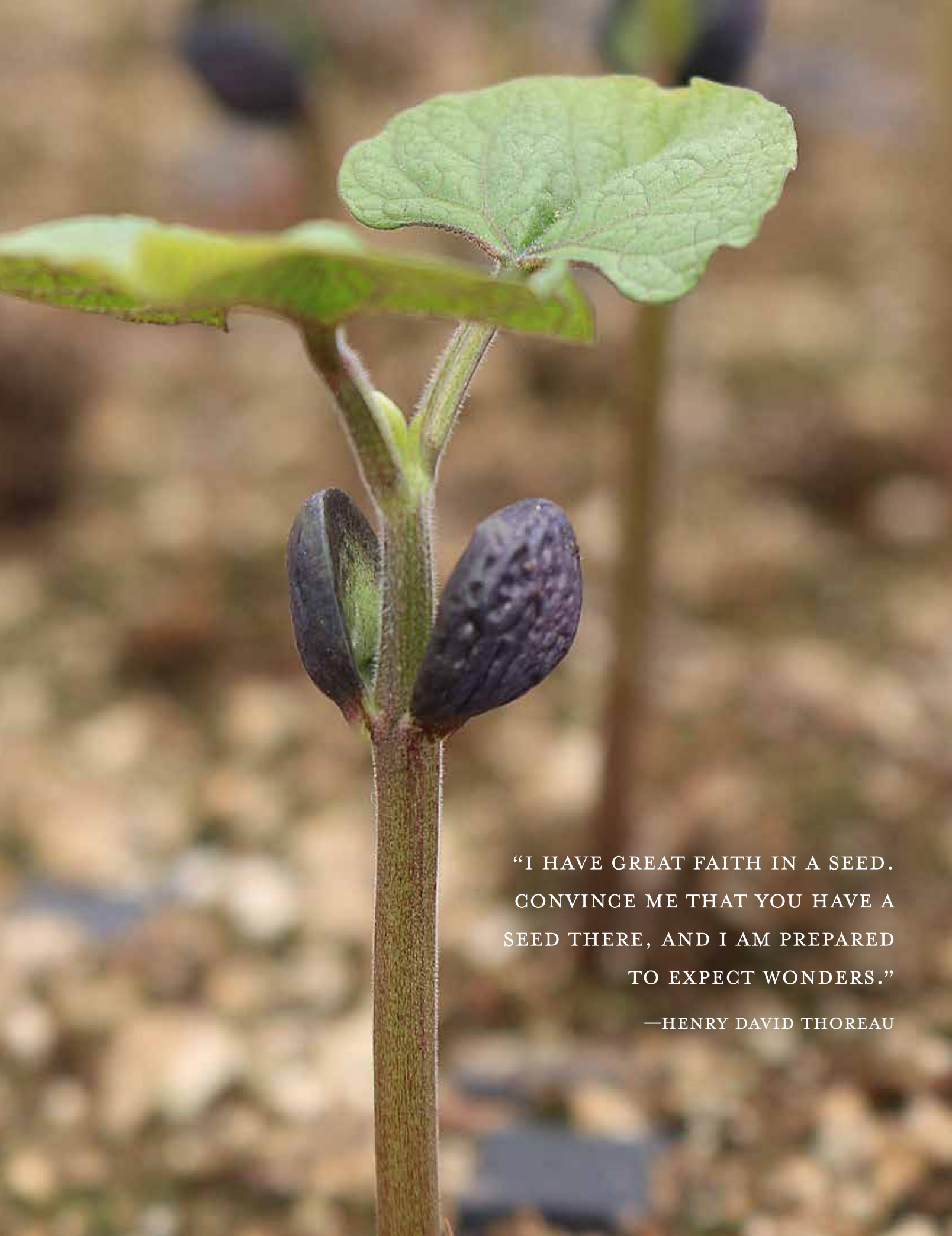


The *Heritage Farm* *Companion*®

A MEMBERSHIP PUBLICATION OF SEED SAVERS EXCHANGE  VOLUME 10 ISSUE 1





“I HAVE GREAT FAITH IN A SEED.
CONVINCE ME THAT YOU HAVE A
SEED THERE, AND I AM PREPARED
TO EXPECT WONDERS.”

—HENRY DAVID THOREAU

INSIDE SSE



While the times around us change, it's time to sow some seeds. *Seeds of hope. Seeds of resilience. Seeds of change.* Whatever seeds you're sowing in the garden this year, we hope more than ever that they *feed, heal, and nourish* you and your community.

Because this year, spring unfortunately brought all of us more challenges than just unpredictable weather. The coronavirus has turned our world upside down as we figure out how to live in the times of a pandemic. But just like the seeds we tend, we're responding and adapting too.

This season is inspiring us to make lots of new history together at Seed Savers Exchange as we pivot our organization in creative ways. We've made significant changes to the way we work on Heritage Farm to keep our staff and our community safe, while also responding to a sharp rise in seed demand as more people return to their garden heritage for security in this unprecedented moment of history.

The gardening renaissance we see on the horizon is a very bright light for the future. And our mission's North Star is guiding us to follow that light and connect even more people with the time-honored traditions of seed saving. Regretfully, we won't be able to connect on-site at Heritage Farm this spring and summer because of the pandemic, but we hope to engage with our community "virtually" instead as we prepare to host our beloved events digitally this year. (More information will be available online soon.)

Until then, please follow our new Resilience Gardens Project video series on social media featuring weekly how-to and ask-the-expert interviews. Enjoy learning from SSE staff and friends as they use the garden to demonstrate how seed saving is the foundation of our food security!

To the promise of brighter tomorrows,

Emily Rose Haga

Emily Rose Haga
Executive Director



5



9



15

CONTENTS

Member Profile: Jeff Nekola	page 5
Planting in Isolation, Together	page 9
CSN Takes Root	page 12
Blooms Everlasting.....	page 15
Called to Serve.....	page 18
Member News.....	page 20

Cover: Spring planting of 'Genovese' basil; photo by Sara Friedl-Putnam.

Inside front cover: Bean seedlings in the SSE greenhouse; photo by Sara Friedl-Putnam.

The Heritage Farm Companion®

Editor-in-Chief
Roger Hartwell

Publisher
Emily Rose Haga
Seed Savers Exchange
3094 N Winn Rd
Decorah, IA 52101

Managing Editor
Sara Friedl-Putnam

Art Director
Nick Wallin

Contributing Writers
Sara Friedl-Putnam
Kathryn Gilbery
Kristine Jepsen
Philip Kauth, PhD

Subscription inquiries should be sent to: membership@seedsavers.org.

SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS!

Are you stewarding an heirloom seed that has a great story?
Do you know of a fellow Seed Savers Exchange member who is making a positive difference in their gardening community?
Or do you just want to comment about something you read in the magazine? We want to hear from you! Write to Heritage Farm Companion, 3094 North Winn Road, Decorah, IA 52101 or e-mail us at membership@seedsavers.org.

Neither Seed Savers Exchange nor the publisher is responsible for statements made by any contributor. Statements or opinions expressed in the Heritage Farm Companion do not represent official policy of Seed Savers Exchange.

Seed Savers Exchange, Inc., is a nonprofit, tax-exempt, member-supported organization

Volume 10 Issue 1

The Heritage Farm Companion (ISSN-2162-0792) is the quarterly member publication of Seed Savers Exchange.

Seed Savers Exchange and The Heritage Farm Companion are federally registered trademarks of Seed Savers Exchange, Inc. Any unauthorized use is strictly prohibited.

Copyright © 2020 by Seed Savers Exchange, Inc.
3094 North Winn Road, Decorah, Iowa 52101
Phone: (563) 382-5990 | Fax: (563) 382-5872
seedsavers.org



Printed on Recycled Paper



Seed Savers EXCHANGE®

We aim to conserve and promote America's culturally diverse but endangered garden and food crop heritage for future generations by collecting, growing, and sharing heirloom seeds and plants.

Founded in 1975 by
Diane Ott Whealy and Kent Whealy

Board of Directors
Neil Hamilton • Beth Lynch • Jovan Sage
Sean Sherman • Rowen White

Special Advisors
Amy Goldman Fowler, PhD
Diane Ott Whealy

Leadership
Emily Rose Haga – Executive Director
Lynne Rilling, CPA – Deputy Director, Administration
Alex Brandt – Administrative Associate
Jim Edrington – Facilities Manager
Roger Hartwell – Marketing and Communications Director
Heather Haynes – Development Director
Koby Jeschkeit-Hagen – Seed Production Manager
Paul Kadlec – Network and Systems Administrator
Philip Kauth, PhD – Preservation Director
Susanna MacWright Craft – Lillian Goldman Visitors Center Manager
John Reynolds – Sales and Business Director
Jeanine Scheffert – Education and Engagement Manager

Administration
Ashley Borreson

Preservation
Rachael Birri • Susana Cabrera-Mariz • Sarah Cousins
Nikita Daly • Robin Delaquess • Ellen Gardner
Kathryn Gilbery • Emily Hagerott • Norah Hummel
Roman Lechuga • Lindsay Lee • Steffen Mirsky
Payton Numedahl • Sara Straate • Shelja Thakur
Trevor Thomas • Rochelle Wiedenhoef

Seed House
Shirley Abbott • Gary Barness • Lisa Blaess
Carter Draves • Cody Egan • Jo Galvis • Kathy Greentree
Tina Hall • Ries Magnuson • Cindy Reifenrath • Jennifer Ripp
Kathy Rosendahl • Sarah Slabaugh • Stevie Sullivan
Maia Usher-Rasmussen • Therese Vang

Marketing and Communications
Sara Friedl-Putnam • Nick Wallin

Development and Membership
Rufina Caluya • Cindy Goodner • Abe Mendez

Facilities
Greg Borgstahl • Nahaylem Ellis • Dave Humpal

Lillian Goldman Visitors Center
Maureen Larson • Raechel Murphy

Advisors
Suzanne Ashworth • Dan Beard • Clive Blazey • David Cavagnaro
Rosalind Creasy • David Ellis, PhD • Jim Henry • Rob Johnston, Jr.
Lindsay Lee • Lee Zieke Lee • Craig LeHoullier, PhD
Deborah Madison • Laura Merrick, PhD
Phil Sponnenberg, PhD • John Swenson



THE PLANT PROFESSOR

MEMBER PROFILE

JEFF NEKOLA

LIFETIME MEMBER JEFF NEKOLA—RESEARCHER, EDUCATOR, AND AVID SEED SAVER—LOOKS TO FELLOW MEMBERS TO HELP HIM RESTORE HIS PRIZED TOMATO AND PEPPER COLLECTION.

By Sara Friedl-Putnam

Imagine, for a moment, ever-so-carefully packing up your most treasured possessions—wrapping, labeling, and boxing them before watching them get loaded onto a moving van, trusting that those prized belongings will arrive safely at their next destination.

Then imagine discovering that those possessions have been lost forever.

That is exactly what happened to Jeff Nekola, lifetime member, when a moving van transporting most of his belongings caught fire in southern Missouri in November 2018. “I had moved from New Mexico to the Czech Republic for work but decided to maintain my seed library in the United States,” he recalls. “I packed my seeds into a Mayflower truck with the rest of my personal belongings for long-term storage in Chicago, but when that truck caught fire, I lost everything, including all my seeds.”

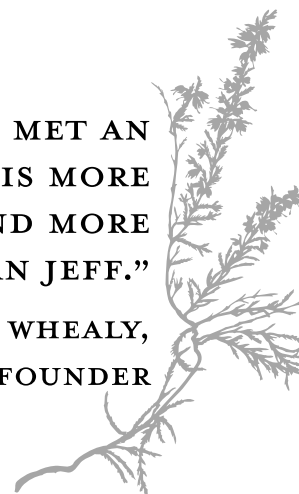
That news would be hard for anyone to digest, but for an expert seed saver who had spent decades of his life stewarding (and sharing, including with Seed Savers Exchange) an extensive collection of “about 500 eggplants, chiles, and tomatoes,” it was a devastating blow.



Jeff Nekola tends a garden spot.

“I HAVE NEVER MET AN
ECOLOGIST WHO IS MORE
KNOWLEDGEABLE AND MORE
SKILLED THAN JEFF.”

—KENT WHEALY,
SSE CO-FOUNDER





"I put my heart and soul into compiling that collection," Jeff says via Skype from Brno, Czech Republic, where he serves as an associate professor in ecology at Masaryk University.

So last fall, Jeff reached out to Seed Savers Exchange with a simple request—to share his story (and a partial list of varieties he had lost) in hopes that his fellow members, many of whom had received seed from him through the years, could help him restore his collection.

"The only chance I have of putting even a bit of this collection back together is because I filled hundreds of seed requests each year when the Yearbook came out," he says.

CIRCLING BACK

The heirloom seed industry was starting to make headlines when Jeff, a native of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, formed what would be a lasting relationship with Seed Savers Exchange in the mid-1990s after joining the faculty of the University of Wisconsin–Green Bay, his newly earned doctorate in ecology from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in hand.

"When I arrived on campus to teach a two-semester course in conservation biology, I discovered pretty quickly that many of the students hadn't ever traveled too far from home," he recalls. "I wasn't sure how they could meaningfully discuss global issues in conservation if they had not been exposed to these issues so I decided that I was going to take them on a weekend trip, to Iowa of all places."

More specifically, to Seed Savers Exchange's Heritage Farm outside Decorah. There, says Jeff, Kent Whealy, SSE's co-founder, welcomed them with open arms, leading them on tours of the preservation gardens and Historic Orchard and encouraging the young college students to not only see but also taste biodiversity. "My students had permission to pull whatever apple they wanted carefully off the trees to smell and to taste," recalls Jeff, "and that was how they truly began to understand biodiversity." So grateful was he for the eye-opening opportunity afforded his class that he bought a lifetime membership (then \$500) on the spot.

That may have been Jeff's first trip to Heritage Farm, but it was far from the last. Each fall for the next decade, until leaving UW–GB in 2004, he would bring another class of students on-site to experience biodiversity firsthand. He also took Whealy up on frequent invitations to speak at the farm—among the many presentations listed on his 25-page CV are five he delivered at the annual Conference and Campout from 1996 through 2003 on topics ranging from "Algific Talus Slope Ecology" to "Diversity of Plants and Animals at Heritage Farm."

Jeff Nekola surveys a garlic patch.



These varieties are among the tomatoes and peppers that Jeff lost in a moving van fire in 2018. Clockwise from upper left: 'Tim's Greek' pepper, 'Zapotec' tomato, 'Ací Siuri' pepper, and 'Pineapple' tomato.

"Jeff is an Iowa boy...who maintains a collection of about 250 tomatoes and 250 peppers and in his professional life does ecological research investigating the biodiversity of native plants, land snails, and butterflies," said Whealy when he introduced him at the 2002 Conference and Campout. "Although he'll always deny it, I think he knows every plant in this Heritage landscape, at every stage and at every season—I have, in fact, never met an ecologist who is more knowledgeable, more skilled, and more driven than Jeff."

It was that drive that helped Jeff launch what would become a hotly anticipated heirloom plant sale to support research and other learning activities for students at UW-GB. Starting with a modest 1,500 plants sold for \$1 each in 1996, the annual Mother's Day sale grew each year, raising more than \$15,000 by 2003 (the last year Jeff was at helm) by offering rare and open-pollinated varieties sourced from the Seed Savers Exchange Yearbook. "I would grow some established favorites and some new varieties each year, and I always provided seed-saving information," he recalls. "By 2003, the lines reached two to three football fields long, not unlike lines at a Grateful Dead concert."

The proceeds generated by the sale brought internationally known ecologists and other experts to speak at the school, supported student research and training, and helped Jeff to maintain an active lab at a time when grant opportunities were not abundant. And because he was trialing 15

to 20 new varieties each year, he discovered many new, cool varieties that piqued his interest. "I would tell Aaron Whealy, who was then running the commercial operation at Seed Savers, that he had to check out this variety or that variety," he says, "and that is where some of the seeds sold today in the catalog originated."

Jeff left Green Bay in 2004 for Albuquerque, where he taught and conducted research at the University of New Mexico until 2018. "Despite my love for ecology, I was on the verge of leaving science by 2018," says Jeff candidly, noting that "15 years of living below the poverty level was no way to live." Thankfully, Masaryk University stepped up to the proverbial plate, offering Jeff a tenured position on its ecology faculty supported by a \$350,000 grant from the Czech Science Foundation. "My focus is on how we see the world," he says of the research he has conducted over the last 35 years. "It is about understanding the mechanisms that have given rise to our diverse world and the things we need to do to protect it."

Outside of the laboratory and the classroom—he is currently teaching conservation biology—Jeff tends a 6'x 6' garden space, where he reports "everything is up" in his "Three Sisters" garden of corn, beans, and squash. He hopes to expand his garden next year with some of the beloved varieties destroyed in that truck fire more than a year ago. "That really is the miracle of Seed Savers Exchange," Jeff says. "Many of these varieties are, hopefully, spread out in the community among members and listers so even though the unthinkable happened, and I lost my collection in a freak accident, I just might have a chance of getting some of these seeds back." ❖



Jeff Nekola tends plants at the Mother's Day Heirloom Plant Sale at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay while supporters look on. Photo courtesy UW-Green Bay.

HELP JEFF NEKOLA REBUILD HIS SEED COLLECTION!

Jeff is seeking the help of his fellow Seed Savers Exchange members to rebuild his prized pepper and tomato collection, lost in 2018 when the moving van transporting the collection caught fire. “If someone requested and received seeds from me and is still growing that seed, it would be so nice to get some back from them,” he says. (Jeff listed these varieties on the Exchange for many years.)

Might you have seeds of any of the following varieties that you could share? (More varieties that Jeff is hoping to replace can be found at <https://www.sci.muni.cz/botany/nekola/Heirloom/index.htm>.) Arllys Adelmann, former SSE staff member and longtime SSE member, has generously offered to collect seeds for Jeff since he currently resides in the Czech Republic. Seeds may be mailed to Arllys Adelmann, 2234 Oil Well Road, Decorah, IA 52101.

PEPPERS

Jeff focused on collecting Andean and miniature Habanero varieties—“Who needs an entire big pod when they are so hot? Better to have tiny ones so nothing goes to waste!”—he says, as well as non-pungent Capsicum chinense varieties, called “seasoning peppers” in the Caribbean. Says Jeff, “They have all the tropical fruit flavor but no heat so they make the most wonderful relishes.”

- Aji Panca
- Australian Lantern
- Birgit’s Locoto
- Bod’e (both red and “yellow”)
- Buena Mulatta
- Butan Commercial #8
- Chile de Cuscutlan
- Chilhuacle Amarillo
- Chilhuacle Negro
- Chilhuacle Rojo
- Chiltepe
- Cochiti
- Cumari
- Datil
- Georgescu Chocolate
- Ivory Habanero
- Limon Chile
- Marab
- Mr. Otley’s Seasoning Pepper
- Orange Thai
- Pakistan #1
- Peanut
- Perfume Trinidad
- Peruvian Serrano
- Petit Marseillais
- PI 543205 (Bolivia)
- Rocotillo
- Short Yellow Tabasco
- St. Helena Acorn
- St. Helena Island Yellow
- Starfish
- Thai Hot
- Tobago Sweet Scotch Bonnet
- Tobago Yellow Scotch Bonnet
- Trinidad Seasoning
- Ulupica de Bolivia
- Vallero
- Wild Brazil
- Willing’s Barbados

TOMATOES

“I am looking for a bit of everything,” says Jeff. “I have listed varieties with diverse colors and leaf shapes, as well as a number of my favorite canning and drying tomatoes.”

- Amana Pink
- Aunt Mary’s
- Bisignano #2
- Brandywine Cherry
- Brandywine, Glick’s Strain
- Brown Derby Mix
- Butter and Bull Heart
- Chiapas Wild
- Coursen Roy’s Stuffing Tomato
- Czechoslovakian
- DeBarrao
- DeBarrao Black
- DeBarrao Gold
- Florida Pink
- Fuzzy Bomb
- German Red Strawberry
- Green and Yellow
- Joe’s Plum
- King Umberto
- Lahman Pink
- Little Basket from Lucca
- Locke
- Lutescent
- Myona
- Orange Banana
- Orange Stuffing
- Paulina
- Piedmontese
- Pineapple
- Pink Grapefruit
- Platfoot Yellow Brandywine
- Plum Lemon
- Purple Russian
- Reisetomate
- Roughwood Golden Plum
- Russian Black
- Schmeig Striped Hollow
- Slankard’s
- Surprise
- Sweet Orange Roma
- Tegucigalpa
- Tonnelet
- Violette’s Polish
- White Wonder
- Yellow Bell

PLANTING IN ISOLATION, TOGETHER

By Kristine Jepsen

My 2020 garden is seeded with quiet, green gratitude.

I'm a plant person, in ways that are probably familiar to most Seed Savers Exchange members.

In spring, dampish egg cartons of seedlings line my windowsills, and each evening, when the soil's been warm enough, I trek to my modest asparagus patch to see if maybe, just maybe, the first crowns are pushing their way toward their annual earthy tart debut at dinner. Raise your hand if you're with me.

When we pass last frost, I move my jungle of houseplants onto my porch to stretch and plump in the Northeast Iowa sunshine and begin gardening outdoors, nestling straw mulch around the young plants, pulling dandelions, and rooting out grass. I water things without splashing the soil (to prevent blight). I worry a little about tiny leaves bent low to the ground by every breeze. My garden is neither big nor show-stopping, and though I've been at it for more than two decades now, I don't garden perfectly. There's always something I could grow better.

Then COVID-19 raised the stakes for my efforts. In spring 2020, for the first time in my adult life, I couldn't buy certain grocery items—or even more than one of each item—*when I wanted them*. And I'm embarrassed by that assumption and entitlement. In many city centers, online and phone-in orders for groceries had to be submitted a week or more in advance. Almost everywhere, we switched to curbside pick up of pre-ordered groceries, changing how we planned meals, budgeted, and cooked.

Photo courtesy Kristine Jepsen



Sprouts pop up from a soil-packed egg carton in Kristine's Northeast Iowa, home.

Photo courtesy Kristine Jepsen

Specifically, the threatened food-supply chains jolted me to consider how food arrives in my kitchen—and how this summer's garden holds much more than feel-good value.

“We may be pressing very small seeds into soil miles and ideologies apart, but we are in the garden together.”

All over the country, local foods systems are sending out tendrils, reaching customers who never before considered sourcing farm-fresh eggs or half a cow from their most-local supply. At the same time, millions of schoolchildren are at home, unable to congregate in classes, instead completing “distance learning” assignments in Google Classroom, rummaging in pantries for still more snacks, and itching for the freedom to swing from cordoned-off public playground equipment.

So it seems that when convenience is removed from the equation of fast + food, home gardening blooms in its full glory for generations of growers. Some remember when backyard produce was part of a national war effort. Some are learning how to freeze, can, or pickle abundant produce for the first time. And some just want to squeeze a cherry tomato with their small fingers or pop it messily between their teeth. We may be pressing very small seeds into soil miles and ideologies apart, but we are in the garden together.

KALE, BEETS, THINGS WE ACTUALLY EAT

In my corner of Northeast Iowa, even farther north than Seed Savers Exchange's Heritage Farm headquarters, two rules of thumb hold true: first, it's foolish to put much out before mid-May, and second, plant only what you'll actually eat. This sounds simple enough, but it's taken me years to resist giving over garden real estate to plants no one in my house loves—or that local farmer friends can grow much better than I can (potatoes, say, or onions).

The first thing I always plant is ‘Lacinato’ kale, better known as “dinosaur” kale for the lumpy, almost reptilian texture of its leaves, and for its extreme cold-hardiness once established. My young daughter tolerates butter-braised kale about once a week on our family menu, but I eat kale every day well into November, blended raw in smoothies. Planted in early May, the leaves of this kale are ready for picking by mid-June—assuming the starts are not crushed by one of my cats, which, I've learned, love to lounge and roll in the sun-warmed dirt I've just smoothed around the little plants as soon as my back is turned.



Kristine's daughter, Eliza, and a furry friend help out with planting in the family's garden plot.

Photo courtesy Kristine Jepsen

Round, red beets are another mainstay in my garden—itself a semi-circular terrace of dry-stone masonry on the west-facing side of my house. I had a friend build up the bed so that I could feel some control over my gardening space—just one small area I could keep weed- and grass-free and watch growing from my kitchen window. Beets are my mother’s favorite vegetable—she will eat them too-hot straight from the sink, where she’s peeling the just-boiled skins, and cold from the refrigerator every day for lunch. My daughter prefers them, too—a holdover from her toddlerhood, when beets were among four easy-to-purée veggies I cooked in bulk and froze in kid-portion containers.

My other early-season fixation is an herb garden that will eventually be taken over by the perennial spearmint I knew better than to plant but did anyway. Two clumps of chives make an early appearance, too, along with the fern peonies—non-edible heirloom flowers propagated by tubers. I got my divisions from my Norwegian-Minnesotan grandmother, who got hers from her mother, and hers from her mother, before Minnesota was a state. By the time the dame’s rocket is blooming in our Iowa ditches, I’ve filled in the mint-free spots in my herb bed with culinary sage, oregano, lemon thyme, parsley, lavender, rosemary, marjoram, and stevia (adding the fresh leaves to smoothies, too).

SAVING THE FLAVOR

By late August and into September, my small plot looks like any other: sprawling with full-grown tomatoes, peppers, basil, dill, fennel, cilantro, and salad greens (themselves several successions deep). My 2020 vision is to save some of each crop, other than the perishable greens. Having a single ingredient fresh-frozen will push me back through my many cookbooks, searching for a sumptuous way to use it. And while my daughter may wrinkle her nose at potato fennel soup, for example, she will promptly share its origins with anyone who will listen—and in that, my mission is accomplished. One day, many years from now, our garden will be entwined with her memories of virtual meet-ups with her classmates and of high anticipation of leaving our farm to run an errand—any errand—by car.

She may also remember having the time just to notice the ritual of growth, of picking the ripest fruits from the vine, and of drying back. She may tell her own stories of saving seeds (well, the easy ones, anyway) and, as cold nights close in, of bringing in the geraniums to overwinter indoors. She will know that their flowers will unfurl silky red as the light returns in midwinter, to begin again. ❖

Kristine Jepsen’s nonfiction appears in print and online and has been nominated for a 2020 Pushcart Prize. She also serves as a counselor for America’s Small Business Development Centers, specializing in farm-based business and women’s entrepreneurship.



Greens emerge from Kristine’s straw-mulched garden plot.

Photo courtesy Kristine Jepsen



“The first thing I always plant is ‘Lacinato’ kale, better known as ‘dinosaur’ kale for the lumpy, almost reptilian texture of its leaves,” says Kristine.

CSN TAKES ROOT



FORMED IN MAY 2017, THE COMMUNITY
SEED NETWORK CONTINUES TO GROW,
INSPIRE, AND BUILD RESILIENCE—
EVEN THROUGH A PANDEMIC.

By Kathryn Gilbery, SSE Exchange and Outreach Coordinator

Just over three years ago—on World Biodiversity Day, May 22—Seed Savers Exchange and SeedChange launched the Community Seed Network (CSN), an online networking and resource website to help seed initiatives and aspiring seed savers thrive. Since then, CSN has grown and evolved in exciting ways while continuing to be a source of hope, inspiration, and connection during these unpredictable times.

To date, more than 500 individuals and organizations have added themselves to the Community Seed Network's map, which serves as a directory for those interested in saving open-pollinated seeds to connect, share ideas, and inspire one another. The CSN website also offers curated educational resources for saving seeds and organizational best practices for seed libraries, seed banks, community gardens, educators, and individuals. Additionally, more than 600 individuals have joined our Facebook group, launched in February of 2018 to facilitate more dialogue and strengthen the community. It has been especially encouraging to see the creative ways our members continue to share seeds and knowledge and support each other during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Community Seed Network transitioned from a working group to a formal advisory council in early 2019. Our advisory council members include those who have been involved with CSN from the beginning and some brand-new faces, representing regions throughout the United States and Canada. Our advisory council members have been instrumental in bringing in new ideas, serving as ambassadors of CSN's mission in their regions, and providing insight on how to keep CSN relevant and accessible to the diverse group of people and projects that are also a part of the network. We feel wonderfully privileged to have such bright minds and leaders contributing their passion, knowledge, and energy to this program, including these three expert seed savers:



BEN COHEN

Ben's penchant for building connections fits right in with CSN's mission. Since he founded the Michigan Seed Network, dozens of seed libraries across the state have begun communicating and sharing resources. This kind of networked strength has never been more important as the onset of COVID-19 has forced closures of seed libraries across Michigan, demanding that organizers find new ways to provide seeds to people amid shelter-in-place

regulations. Like many others, Ben has also had to overcome professional challenges due to the virus; his busy public-speaking schedule would have been entirely canceled had he not worked with his networks to reimagine them as virtual engagements.

Ben emphasizes the important role of the Community Seed Network at this time, both as a gateway to our many knowledgeable members—many of whom have offered to be mentors—and as a platform with an engaged audience. "Seed savers by definition are creative people," he reflects. No doubt it's true that the creativity, patience, and dedication that creates a beautiful seed crop may also serve seed savers well as they negotiate the uncertainty brought on by the pandemic.



JILL BISHOP

Visitors to the 2019 SSE Conference and Campout may remember Jill Bishop of Peterborough, Ontario, who proved that seed saving is not reserved for trained horticulturists or those with access to large growing spaces. Jill began her seed company, urbantomato, on rented land and today grows much of her seed in her average-sized city backyard. Jill's other involvements include supporting community gardens as the community food coordinator for Nourish, organizing the Peterborough Seedy Sunday, and educating anyone and everyone who will listen on the importance of seed saving.

As seed companies across both the United States and Canada experience straining levels of demand in the wake of the pandemic, Jill speaks to the value of the Community Seed Network's online resources now more than ever. "Eaters everywhere have recognized that gardening is a vital tool of resilience in these uncertain times," she says. "Gardeners who are just beginning as well as those looking to expand their production can benefit from education, especially in regards to seed saving." Jill has long advocated that seed saving is a skill that is relevant to all gardeners, and she sees it as especially pertinent now to decrease reliance on seed companies.



ANNA STANGE

Anna, a folk singer and artist by trade, says her life has changed since becoming a member of the CSN Advisory Council. Namely, she has been exercising her voice more freely as an advocate. Anna started the Blue Island Seed Library in a suburb outside of Chicago just a few years ago. The success of that initiative inspired her to become a resource for fellow librarians looking to implement seed libraries of their own.

This winter, Anna made a big change by moving to a farm in rural Florida, where she wasted no time getting to know her community and quickly became a source of knowledge for her neighbors' many gardening questions. "I've had to postpone plans to open a seed library in my new community," she says, "but I'm keeping busy sharing seeds via the mail and talking about the CSN whenever I get a chance." ❖

Other experts serving on the CSN Advisory Council include Tiffany Traverse (featured in the 2020 Winter Heritage Farm Companion), Ibrahim Loeks, Keith Monahan, Eva Parr, Christina Tierney, Betsy Samuelson, Becky Griffin, Jeanine Scheffert, and Steph Hughes. We are deeply grateful to each of these seed leaders for bringing their passion and skills to the Community Seed Network.

To become involved in the Community Seed Network, visit communityseednetwork.org and add your information to the directory. You can search the directory for programs in your area and for mentors to help you start a seed initiative of your own, as well as download (and share!) the educational resources on the site. To stay up to date on CSN news and make even more connections within the network, join our Community Seed Network Facebook group. For more information on SeedChange, visit weseedchange.org.



COMMUNITY SEED NETWORK

communityseednetwork.org

BLOOMS EVERLASTING

By Kristine Jepsen

You know it when you see it: a show-stopping bed of flowers with color spilling from every corner. All the plants have beautifully matured to their full height, with taller varieties dangling buds high above and mid-height—and edge plants thriving below. But how do you design and start your own?

The key to year-round flowers is to first dig into the details of your plant hardiness zone (as noted on the USDA's oft-consulted map) and then prepare an optimal garden space—one with the soil, light, and moisture your favorite blooms prefer. The following flowers thrive best in zones 4-7—including at Seed Savers Exchange's Heritage Farm in Decorah, Iowa (zone 4b)—but most every hardiness zone has many flower varieties that prosper in its particular growing conditions.

FLOWERS TO PLANT IN SPRING

It's natural to feel anticipation for the colors of summer as soon as the snow begins to melt. To introduce early interest in your garden, stock up on annual flowers—those that must be planted each year—that love the still-cool weather. At Seed Savers Exchange, these include Historic Pansies Mix (*Viola x wittrockiana*), full of golds, burgundies, and violets; Vining Petunias (*Petunia multiflora*); and semi-dwarf Tetra Mix Snapdragons (*Antirrhinum majus*), all of which can be started indoors from seed, following seeding directions on the packet.

YES, YOU CAN PLANT
A FLOWER GARDEN THAT
FLOURISHES THROUGHOUT
THE SEASONS.



Sea Shells Cosmos

Vining Petunia is among the spring flowers that have appeared in Iowa gardens for more than a century, with fragrant blooms of white, pink, lavender, and purple on sturdy stems reaching up to three feet. Another cool-weather lover is the showstopping Bells of Ireland (*Moluccella laevis*), with its namesake bell-shaped, fragrant chartreuse calyces surrounding tiny white flowers.

Many gardeners group spring-loving flowers in planters or tuck them along edges of beds filled with heat-tolerant summer blooms that create shade for spring beauties until cool temperatures arrive again in the fall.



Crego Mix China aster



Mongolian Giant Sunflower



Black-eyed Susan



Historic Pansies



Benary's Giant Zinnia

SUMMER FLOWERS

In the Midwest, flowers that bloom all summer are the hallmark of the growing season, and none say “balmy weather” better than Benary’s Giant Zinnia (*Zinnia elegans*). With three- to four-foot stems and fist-sized double-blossomed flowers, this variety can be sown directly after last frost and will bloom until heavily frosted, usually in late September, if spent flowers are pinched back to make room for new ones.

If you’re looking for an extra splash of color, direct seed the easy-to-grow Diablo Cosmos (*Cosmos sulphureus*), beloved for its red-gold blooms amid feathery two- to three-foot foliage. Cosmos also come in mixes of white, pink, magenta, and purple. For an eye-catching variation, try the delicate Sea Shells Cosmos (*Cosmos bipinnatus*), bearing flowers of pink, red, and white, with each petal fluted like a shell and the buds suspended on four- to five-foot stems.

Beneath the mid-height zinnia and cosmos, try a Calendula Mix (*Calendula officinalis*) of sunny cream, gold, and amber daisy-like flowers. Growing 20-24 inches in height, calendula will readily self-seed, meaning they drop ample seed during the growing season and thereby give next year’s flowers a chance to open earlier as seeds will establish as soon as sun and heat coax them from the soil.

To add tall, elegant height to a summer garden, you can’t go wrong with sunflowers. The Seed Savers Sunflower Mix (*Helianthus annuus*) offers a blend of varieties with blooms of yellow, orange, and burgundy. Direct-seeded after frost, sunflowers will grow up to six feet in height and begin blooming 60 days from planting. For eye-popping panache, throw in some Mongolian Giant Sunflowers (*Helianthus annuus*) for stalks towering 12-14 feet overhead and plate-sized, 16- to 18-inch flowers brimming with edible seeds. (Note: Those tall plants may need staking if they’re exposed to wind!)



Tetra Mix Snapdragon



Diablo Cosmos



Purple Coneflower

FALL FLOWERS

In the Upper Midwest, perennial prairie wildflowers are the hallmark of autumn. Fall blooming flowers include coreopsis, coneflower, and rudbeckia (or black-eyed Susan).

Mixed perennial beds started from seed are best sown in late fall after first frost (but before the ground has frozen solid) into well-cultivated, grass-free soil. This gives the seeds up to a two-week head start on the same varieties sown in the spring. While some flowers may bloom in their first year, many others will likely take two or more seasons to establish.

Among the longest-lasting wildflower blooms are the asters, with their delicate daisy-like flowers ranging in color from white to lavender to deep indigo. Some of this family, including upland white aster and the stately deep-violet New England aster, are perennial in zones 4-7. Others, such as Crego Mix China Aster (*Callistephus chinensis*) are among fall flowers planted annually from seed, with blooms lasting right up until heavy frost.

Finally, fall is best for planting spring bulbs, such as tulip and garlic, which will produce scapes that can be left to flower the following season. These bulbs need to establish roots and weather a winter dormancy to be triggered to sprout in the spring.

WINTER FLOWERS

Winter-flowering plants in the Midwest take a few, er, different forms than in warmer climates. Look to established shrubs and hardy flowers such as sumac and wild rose (Iowa's state flower) for long-lasting, blush-colored rose hips and fruit clusters that festoon branches well into the snow of winter. Likewise, red-osier dogwood, a shrub native to Iowa, turns rose-gold in autumn, providing brilliant contrast to surrounding dormant plants.

Finally, if letting frost level your flower bed feels too disheartening, consider taking in tender perennials, including dianthus, geranium, impatiens, and coleus, which can be coaxed to thrive in a sunny windowsill. Rest assured that a new catalog from Seed Saver Exchange will arrive in mid-winter, just in time to inspire a new season of endless blooms. ❖

Kristine Jepsen's nonfiction appears in print and online and has been nominated for a 2020 Pushcart Prize. She also serves as a counselor for America's Small Business Development Centers, specializing in farm-based business and women's entrepreneurship.

CALLED TO SERVE

DEDICATED VOLUNTEERS HELP
SEED SAVERS EXCHANGE CARRY OUT
ITS VITAL MISSION TO SAVE AND
SHARE OPEN-POLLINATED SEEDS

“What is the essence of life?” pondered Greek philosopher Aristotle more than 2,300 years ago. “To serve others and to do good.” There’s certainly no shortage of ways volunteers can “do good” in today’s world, and that is especially true at Seed Savers Exchange’s Heritage Farm in Decorah. From helping maintain gardens and writing thank-you notes to supporters to compiling seed histories and packaging seed boxes for distribution to community gardens, each year dozens of volunteers freely give their time, talents, and energy to help advance our mission to save and share heirloom and open-pollinated seeds.

In fact, in 2018, volunteers donated 1,324 hours of time; in 2019, they gave 1,066 hours helping out in various critical ways across the organization. Like most nonprofits, Seed Savers Exchange has plenty of opportunities for people to pitch in and help. And we are thankful for the dedicated volunteers—including Peter van der Linden and Dale Emery, spotlighted here—who are doing just that and making Heritage Farm and, indeed, the world a better place as a result.



PETER VAN DER LINDEN

Decorah resident Peter van der Linden has worked with arboreta and botanical gardens for much of his life, so volunteering at Seed Savers Exchange after retiring as director of the Iowa Lakeside Lab would seem a natural fit.

“I thought that Seed Savers Exchange would be a great place to volunteer my time, so I called to inquire about opportunities right after moving to Decorah in May 2015,” he recalls.

Over the past five years, Peter has assisted Sara Straate, seed historian, with several key projects. He has reviewed varieties to determine whether they are “Exchange heirlooms” (that have been traded on the Exchange for at least 20 years) and updated their status accordingly. He has combed through letters submitted by seed donors to help determine if a given variety meets the requirements to be classified as a “family heirloom.” And, most recently, he has helped organize and consolidate the organization’s extensive seed-catalog collection. “It’s getting to be a pretty big collection,” he says with a laugh. “And we’re not done yet.”

“YOU ORIGINALLY COME BECAUSE YOU
SUPPORT THE MISSION OF THE ORGANIZATION,
BUT YOU STAY BECAUSE OF THE PEOPLE.”

—PETER VAN DER LINDEN

Of course, Peter is no stranger to big projects. After earning a master’s degree in botany from Iowa State University, he served first as director of the Iowa Arboretum near Boone (from 1981-87) and then as curator of plant collections at Morton Arboretum outside Chicago.

In 1998, he returned to Iowa to serve as director of the Bickelhaupt Arboretum in Clinton for two years before spending seven years as director of Fernwood Botanical Garden and Nature Preserve in Niles, Michigan. In 2007, Iowa Lakeside Laboratory, a 140-acre campus on West Lake Okoboji dedicated to teaching and on-site scientific research, welcomed Peter as its first full-time, on-site director in its (then) nearly 100-year history. There he strengthened community relationships, mapped out strategies for future growth, and (quite possibly!) hugged a tree or two.

It was decades ago, while working a temporary job at the Fish Hatchery in Decorah, that Peter discovered the natural beauty of the Driftless Area and decided to purchase a piece of woodlands just north of Decorah. "I would always drive by North Winn Road and see the sign for Heritage Farm," he says. "One day my wife, Judy, and I visited and decided to join as members—we thought that the mission was just wonderful and the work so important."

Today, he is a familiar face at Heritage Farm on many Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. "You could probably take 250 hours per year and multiply it by five and you would get pretty close to the total number of hours I have volunteered at Seed Savers Exchange," says Peter, who also volunteers with the Porter House Museum and the Decorah Tree Board. "I am pretty typical of what is said about many volunteers—you originally come because you support the mission of the organization, but you stay because of the people."

DALE EMERY

That sentiment is echoed by Dale Emery of Decorah, whose volunteer efforts at Seed Savers Exchange have focused on the Herman's Garden program.

Since 2012, Dale has answered the call time and again when asked to sort seed packets for the program, which distributes free seeds to seed libraries, nonprofits, and school and community gardens across the nation. It's detailed work—involving separating seed packets into categories to ensure the right number of seed varieties are placed in each box of 50 seed packets—but he enjoys it. "To me, it's like a concentration game," he says. "It helps my memory and provides me with a bit of exercise, too."

Dale grew up in Bluffton, Iowa, just north of Decorah and began farming soon after graduating from North Winneshiek Schools in 1974. About 12 years later, he decided to switch gears and rent out his farmland so he could embark on a new venture, installing fences (which he did until about 2001). "I didn't have to do much advertising," he recalls, noting that he even put up fencing at Heritage Farm. "It was really all word of mouth, and people just called me." He followed that venture with a state job



that he held until suffering an injury in 2005. (Initially unable to stand without pain for even a few minutes, he can now stand for hours at a time.)

Today, beginning in the fall and going into spring, Dale is a fixture at the Northeast Iowa Peace and Justice Center in downtown Decorah, where he spreads out and organizes seed packets on long tables, logging close to 185 hours on that activity in 2019 alone.

"TO ME, IT'S LIKE A CONCENTRATION GAME. IT HELPS MY MEMORY AND PROVIDES ME WITH A BIT OF EXERCISE, TOO."

—DALE EMERY

And it's not the only good he is doing in and beyond Northeast Iowa. Along with others in the Decorah-based Friends of Recovery group, which meets twice a week, he makes birthday cards and bookmarks for residents of local nursing homes and get-well cards for patients at Winneshiek County Hospital. "Some of the nursing home residents don't get any other mail," he says. "It's nice to get out, be with friends, share our problems or challenges, and also help others while doing all of that." ❖

According to the Nonprofit Source, 63 million Americans volunteered for at least one nonprofit organization in 2016. Seed Savers Exchange is grateful for all of the volunteers who donate their time, talents, and energy not only to our organization but also to countless others across the nation.



Shelley Buffalo



Jessika Greendeer



Becky Webster

SSE awarded SARE grant for Rematriation project

The most rewarding aspect of working at Seed Savers Exchange, for me, is connecting people to seeds. Whether working with a home gardener or a longtime seed steward—or reconnecting family members to their own heirloom—this is the reason the collection at Seed Savers Exchange exists. I am continually amazed by the collection, the stories accompanying the seeds, and the connection humans and seeds have forged. The deep connection to seeds has been with humans for thousands of years, and Seed Savers Exchange has been committed to strengthening this connection since its founding.

In 2017, under the guidance of Rowen White, SSE board chair, Seed Savers Exchange partnered with the Indigenous Seed Keepers Network and the Native American Food Sovereignty Alliance to help advance their Rematriation movement. The focus of Rematriation is returning seeds to Indigenous communities of origin and reuniting them with their seed relatives. Through the first two years of the partnership, Seed Savers Exchange grew 20 varieties each year at our headquarters, Heritage Farm; Rowen has since found homes for these seeds.

Once again, under guidance from Rowen, this year Seed Savers Exchange received a grant from North Central Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) to partner with three Indigenous women farmers to rematriate seeds to their communities. We are delighted to form this participatory conservation model and strengthen our friendships with Shelley Buffalo, local foods coordinator with the Meskwaki Nation (Tama, Iowa); Jessika Greendeer, Ho-Chunk Nation member and Seed Regeneration Manager at Dream of Wild Health (Hugo, Minnesota); and Becky Webster, an enrolled citizen of the Oneida Nation (De Pere, Wisconsin). Among the four partner sites (including Heritage Farm), we are growing 27 varieties for Rematriation, mostly beans, corn, squash, and tobacco.

The goals of the project are to learn about the varieties (including their histories and cultural importance) while strengthening our bonds to the seeds, to food, and to each other. During the next several months, we will be sharing what Becky, Jessika, and Shelley are passionate about and their hopes for the future. We will also work with them to highlight the stories of the varieties we are growing. We hope as well to offer some educational programming centering on Rematriation that will bring people together to celebrate these seeds and their return home. Life begins with a seed, and seeds sustain humans just as humans sustain seeds. This relationship is at the forefront of this partnership, one in which Seed Savers Exchange is humbled and honored to take part.

For more information about the Seed Rematriation project, visit our blog at blog.seedsavers.org/blog/seed-rematriation. For more information about SARE, visit sare.org.

—Philip Kauth, Ph.D., SSE Director of Preservation





This beautiful bean is one of the varieties Seed Savers Exchange is stewarding as part of the ongoing Rematriation project detailed on page 20.

Share your recipes with Seed Savers Exchange!

Just like treasured heirloom seeds, great recipes are meant to be shared—and Seed Savers Exchange is hoping you will share your favorites with our community. We are seeking recipes featuring your favorite SSE varieties for publication in our 2021 seed catalog and/or on our website. If your recipe is selected for publication, we will send you one of our themed seed collections as a special thank you!

Submitting your recipe(s) is easy! Simply e-mail your recipe by July 15, 2020, to sfriedlputnam@seedsavers.org, along with your name, address, daytime telephone number, and a brief note about why you love it or what inspired you to create it. Please also include a photo of your prepared recipe if you are able. You can also mail your recipe(s) to SSE Recipes, Att'n Sara Friedl-Putnam, 3094 North Winn Rd, Decorah, IA 52101.

What Your Membership Means to SSE

Like many other nonprofits, and most other seed companies, Seed Savers Exchange has faced unforeseen challenges this year as we work to fulfill our mission and meet increased demand for what we offer while doing all we can to keep our staff safe through these difficult times.

While we have been developing plans for virtual events and other creative ways to stay connected with you and everyone else in our community—and collaborating with many partners to provide hands-on as well as online opportunities for engagement and education for the many new gardeners and new seed savers who are trying this out for the first time—we are also continuing to carry out all of the work that is so critical to our mission. Collecting, regenerating, saving, preserving, and sharing seeds and knowledge from Heritage Farm is at the core of our work, and you support this vital work by being a member.

Thank you.

We know that these times are challenging, and it means a lot to all of us at Seed Savers Exchange that you are standing with us. Because of you, we have been able to continue our mission-driven work to steward and share the seeds that give us all hope. Thank you for showing your support right now, when sharing seeds and spreading knowledge about seed saving is more important than ever to ensure resilience, comfort, and food security in our world.

We are grateful you are with us in this work.



Visit seedsavers.org/recipes for some of our favorite recipes, including a huckleberry jam recipe first shared in the 2020 catalog by Diane Ott Whealy, co-founder of Seed Savers Exchange.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

I've never seen a "letters" section in *The Heritage Farm Companion*, but here is some feedback, to use or not as suits.

The "Tomato Mythbusters" article by Julia Braulick, in the 2019 Harvest edition of *The Heritage Farm Companion*, was one of the most interesting and useful articles that I remember reading in this newsletter. For me, more such articles with hard data would be a pleasure to receive. Nutritional data, research results on seed viability as it differs (or doesn't) among varieties, and similar themes as they relate to vegetable species and varieties would feel both appropriate and useful.

May I suggest a follow-up piece to Ms. Braulick's article that also relates to the food-preservation articles in this issue? It is fairly well known that in tomatoes, the level of vitamin C decreases as the fruit ripens[1]. I have never seen this quantified, let alone related to tomato varieties or types (like paste types, tomatoes of different colors, etc.). That would be part A. Part B would be to correlate total acidity changes as the fruit ripens. This would inform tomato-canning strategies. Is ascorbic acid the primary acid in tomatoes, or are other acids also important? What is the correlation with ripening of other important nutrients, such as fiber, lycopene, and vitamin A? This could lead to development of a quantitative database of nutrients of vegetable species, which probably is easily available from USDA or WHO or FAO, with comparative statistics for all these varieties that we are trying to save. After all, we are saving them because they are food.

I would readily buy a book from SSE that compared nutrient levels of different varieties within vegetable species. Another topic of potential interest would be the relative content of nutrients (or toxins) in different parts of the harvest. Clark Nicklow of the Waltham (Massachusetts) Agricultural Field Station had developed quite a bit of data showing where lead accumulated in different crops. In some root crops, for example, it was near the skin, and with others it was in the main edible tissue. (His job was to conduct tissue tests of samples from urban gardens to check for heavy metals in particular.) This was around 1980. I was a young man of about 40 at the time; I had an excellent memory, and thought it would persist. It hasn't, so I don't dare quote what I think that I remember. Steve Tracey and I encouraged Mr. Nicklow to publish his observations, but for some reason he was not interested. Before I forget again why I am mentioning this, here it is—Clark told us that different varieties of the same crop, for example green shell peas, accumulated different levels of toxins when grown in the same or comparable soil. (I believe he also tested soil samples.) Presumably the same variability pertains to mineral nutrients as well.

Wouldn't it be useful, for example, to test for arsenic (As) representative samples of the varieties of the heirloom apples grown in the Heritage Farm orchard? All apples are dynamic accumulators of As, but doubtless some varieties are less toxic than others.

I apologize for a somewhat scattered epistle. I hope that some bit of it is useful!

Dan Hemenway

Barking Frogs Permaculture, Sparr, Florida

[1] It is interesting that in peppers, which share with tomatoes membership in the nightshade family, all major nutrients increase during ripening so that red peppers are much more nutritious than the green (immature) specimens.





Vibrant colors make a splash in new Farmhouse Garden

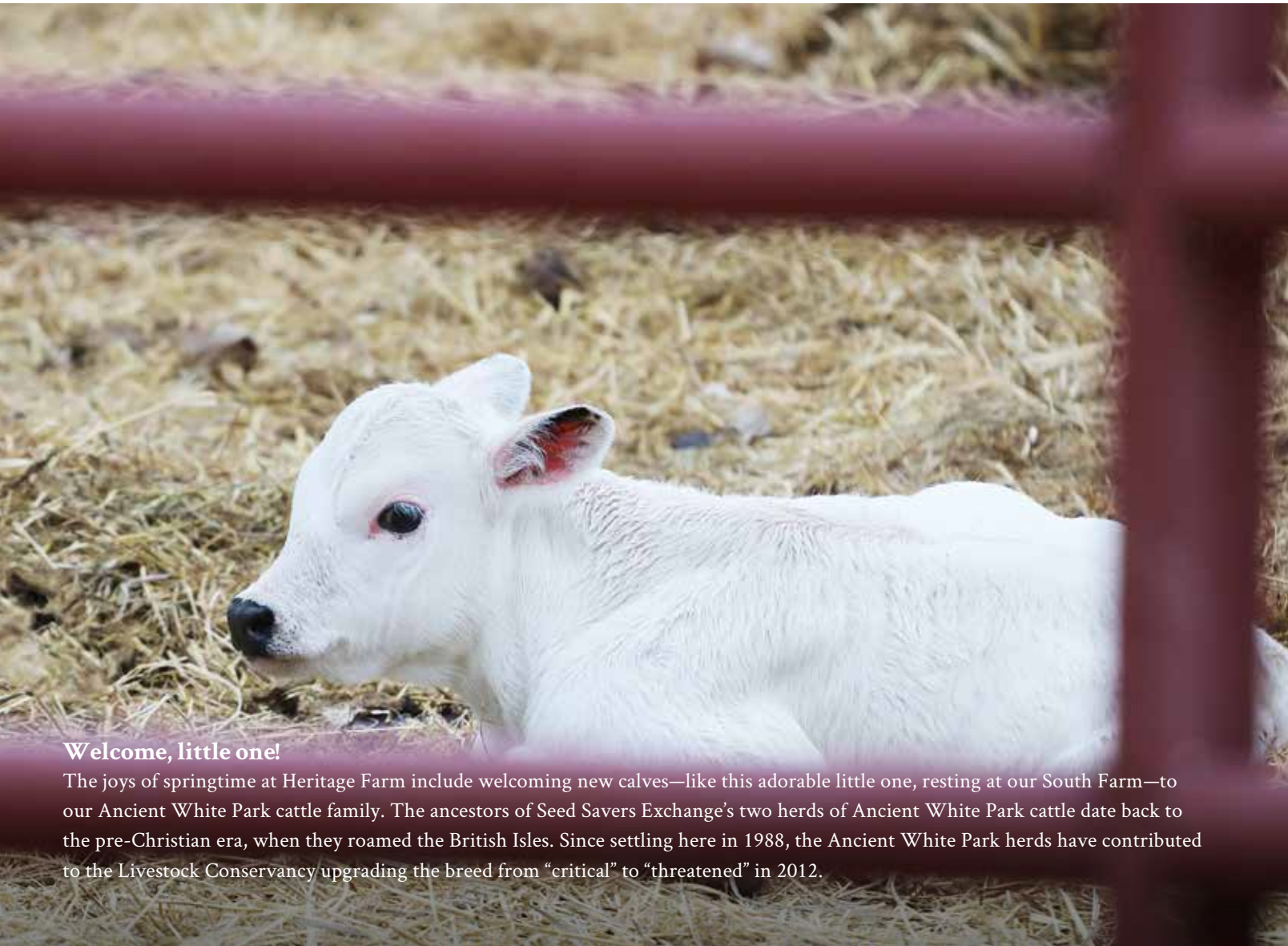
The grape hyacinth's small, bell-shaped, cobalt-blue flowers make a charming addition to the new Farmhouse Garden at Heritage Farm. The flower variety is one of many ornamental plants that were recently added to the Farmhouse Garden as part of a project funded by the Stanley Smith Horticultural Trust. The project also included the construction of a new terrace behind the farmhouse.



Seed Savers E X C H A N G E[®]

3094 North Winn Road
Decorah, IA 52101

Change Service Requested



Welcome, little one!

The joys of springtime at Heritage Farm include welcoming new calves—like this adorable little one, resting at our South Farm—to our Ancient White Park cattle family. The ancestors of Seed Savers Exchange's two herds of Ancient White Park cattle date back to the pre-Christian era, when they roamed the British Isles. Since settling here in 1988, the Ancient White Park herds have contributed to the Livestock Conservancy upgrading the breed from "critical" to "threatened" in 2012.