

How heirloom seeds help preserve genetic diversity

Safeguarding heirlooms may be more important now than ever, as the full scope of [our current biodiversity emergency](#) continues to come into focus. [Studies have shown](#) the crisis has been primarily driven by [our food system](#), which puts species at risk through habitat destruction, inputs like fertilizers and pesticides and reliance on monoculture (growing one species at a time), in addition to carbon emissions that hasten climate change. But [biodiversity is crucial for limiting climate change's impact](#).

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Many heirlooms are known for their intense or unique flavor. "Growers who produce our seeds are stewarding those old varieties that taste like home," says [Truelove Seeds' Owen] Taylor, who adds that immigrants and refugees in a new place often find the flavors of their culture in heirloom seeds.

But the longevity of these plants also says something in itself: "They have withstood storms and floods and they're hardy, so they should be preserved for their genetic biodiversity and for agricultural diversity," Nelson explains. Every time someone grows an heirloom seed, they are preserving that diversity and ensuring these seeds continue on for future generations; groups like [Seed Savers Exchange](#) connect people growing the same varieties so they can work together to ensure the plants aren't lost forever.

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