

# Heirloom vs Hybrid

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As the weather gets warmer and spring gets nearer, thoughts turn to what to plant in the garden. Who hasn't browsed through the latest seed catalog on that very cold and dreary day, dreaming of the flowers and vegetables they would like to grow?

Have you thought about growing heirloom varieties? There are 100s of ways to purchase those old tried and true varieties that our grandparents grew.

You may be asking, "What's the difference between heirloom and regular store-bought seeds."

Actually, a lot.

Regular or 'hybrid' seeds come in packages you normally see in stores. These seeds are usually produced in large greenhouses for specific traits of the parent plants. Those plants are pollinated by human intervention methods from two plants known for specific traits to produce an offspring plant with those traits. This can be positive in some situations such as better fruit/vegetable production, disease resistance, or insect resistance.

Most hybrid seeds cannot be saved from year to year as they will not produce a plant with the same characteristics as the original seeds, because they were the result of a special cross-pollination process.



Photo courtesy of Etsy

An heirloom seed is one that has been grown continuously from seed for more than 50 years and has been pollinated by nature meaning, bees, butterflies, and no human intervention. To earn the term 'heirloom' the seed's heritage or lineage must be traceable back through the generations. Many of these seeds have been passed down through families.

Unlike, hybrid seeds, you can save the seeds this year to plant next year and they will produce the same plant with the same characteristics.

Historically, seeds were saved from the current crop and stored for the next year by families of all cultures. If those seeds were kept in a dark, cool, and dry place, they could last for many, many years.

An example of how long these seeds will remain viable was published in the New York Times in 2005. The article stated that the oldest seed on record was reported by Israeli researchers as a 2,000-year-old palm variety that was found in a clay storage jar at Masada. Some 40 years after it was discovered, some of the seeds were

planted. The seeds germinated and grew. It was also noted that the variety had been extinct for many years.

You can request catalogs at the following sites:

Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds [www.rareseeds.com](http://www.rareseeds.com)

Seed Savers Exchange [www.seedsavers.org](http://www.seedsavers.org)

Annie's Heirloom Seeds [www.anniesheirloomseeds.com](http://www.anniesheirloomseeds.com)

BBB Seed Company [www.bbbseed.com](http://www.bbbseed.com)