

Heritage Seed Library Varieties for Chelsea

Lettuce 'Mescher'

An Austrian heirloom variety dating back to the 1700s. A slow-growing, compact lettuce with unusual crinkled, leaves with a pretty red tinge to the margin, brightening up any salad bowl. These tightly packed leaves blanch the heart, giving it a very sweet flavour. Known to be cold hardy. 77 days sow to harvest (approx.).

Lettuce 'Bronze Arrow'

A beautiful, productive and very useful lettuce. This California heirloom is popular in the USA but almost unknown here. Drought and cold hardy, making it ideal when autumn-sown, for overwintering. It survived frost and snowfall at Ryton. Also, less popular with slugs. A large, non-hearting lettuce; the attractive, arrowhead-shaped leaves have a distinctive bronze tinge and mild flavour. Seed Guardian Keith Bickmore describes it as "outstanding".

Lettuce 'Bloody Warrior'

An ex-commercial variety donated to the Heritage Seed Library by M Ward in 2007. This cos-type lettuce has crisp, green leaves speckled with red. Our donor suggests planting out in autumn and overwintering with protection; the lettuces will heart up for early summer harvesting.

Beetroot 'Ukrainian'

Donated by Unwins Seeds in 1992, this variety has tender flesh and is easy to peel therefore perfect for salads. It is also great for making Borscht; cabbage, beetroot and tomato soup. If you'd like the recipe with this variety choice, please mark 'with recipe' next to the variety name on your Request Form.

Spinach 'Bloomsdale'

This variety has been considered as the old standard since 1925. The semi-upright plants are slow to go to seed doing better in hot weather than most varieties. Produces a continuous yield of thick-textured, crinkled, glossy, deep green, sweet and delicious leaves that are not bitter when eaten raw or when cooked.

Calaloo 'Mrs McGhie'

This is a typical Jamaican variety with large pale green leaves showing some red colouration. Most Jamaican people on allotments grow calaloo and it has a wide range of uses: stir fried with coconut milk and tomatoes, in soups and steamed with fish. The waist high plants have long, drooping, lime green, tassel-like flowers.

Kale 'Red Russian'

This is very hardy and is significantly taller than either 'Ragged Jack' or 'Russian' kales. The leaves are markedly lobed rather than deeply divided. The flower buds can be eaten early spring and are equally as delectable as the leaves. Known as an American variety and originally said to have been introduced by Russian traders.

Kale 'Vates Blue Curled'

This hardy, dwarf (30-40cm), variety produces finely curled, blue-green leaves that are particularly tender to eat following a light frost. These strongly-flavoured leaves can be eaten as a cut and come again, or the whole plant can be uprooted. The extent of the blue colouration varies but it does look great in an ornamental border as well as being a valuable food crop.

Dwarf French Bean 'Early Warwick'

Known in England before 1890, this bean is early, reliable and particularly prolific considering its size. Compact plants produce lilac flowers followed by green pods, which are stringless when young. Excellent dried, when the beans have attractive pink-maroon mottles. Seed Guardian Eluned Paramor found that it "thrived on drought, deluge, neglect and TLC!"

Pea 'Parsley'

An unusual variety with edible tendrils that resemble curled parsley. Seed Guardian Anne Wheldon found "we never manage to cook these because they are so delicious raw!". Guardian Dina Penrose commented, "Fascinating appearance, aroused a lot of interest from fellow allotment holders. Worth growing for appearance and young tendrils alone," although Dina found that each plant had to be individually tied to stakes.

Vietnamese Mustard 'Hong's'

Vietnamese mustard can be stir-fried or mixed with other salad leaves. Worth growing for its flavour - it has a sweet taste with a peppery kick but not quite as ferocious as winter mustards. Before it flowers it produces tiny broccoli-like lime green florets. These are great for adding flavour and texture to salads.

Amaranth 'Tower Hamlets'

Donated by the "Coriander Club", Tower Hamlets, London, the seeds originally came from Bangladesh. The plants have purple stems and taste like chard when eaten raw. The leaves may be eaten at any stage and can be cooked like a chard or spinach. A welcome addition to the "greens" selection.

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