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*In 1985, the 4-H Heritage Gardening project was awarded a Certificate of Commendation from the American Association for State and Local History.*

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Special appreciation is extended to the members of the 1982-83 State 4-H Horticulture Developmental Committee for reviewing and piloting this bulletin:

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Additional assistance was also provided by Martha Brownscombe, Director, 4-H FOLKPATTERNS project; Marsha MacDowell, Curator, Folk Arts Division, The Museum, Michigan State University; and Yvonne Lockwood, State Folklife Specialist, The Museum, Michigan State University.

Funding for this project was provided by a Youth Projects grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities and by the Michigan 4-H Youth Programs.

# Come to the Fair

## How It All Began

*“Our harvest being gotten in, our governor sent four men on fowling, that we might after a special manner rejoice together after we had gathered the fruit of our labors.”*

So wrote pilgrim Edward Winslow to a friend in England shortly after the colonists in Plymouth, Massachusetts, celebrated their first successful harvest. The year was 1621, and this was the first American Harvest Home Feast which we now call Thanksgiving. Over 350 years later, we still continue this American custom.

Fairs are another way in which people celebrate the harvest. Fairs had been held in Europe for many years before the idea spread to America. In 1807, Elkanah Watson exhibited two Merino sheep on the public square in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. Watson thought American farmers were slipping behind Europeans in their farm technology and animal husbandry. He felt the opportunity to compete would stimulate them to produce better products. Watson's wife began displaying her homemade preserves on a table next to his sheep. Soon the local men and women became interested in fair going and showing!

The fair idea became popular, and agricultural exhibitions spread westward. Abraham Lincoln called fairs the “time-keeper of history,” an observation still appropriate today as people reacquaint themselves with many of the crafts and techniques of an earlier time.

Kalamazoo County holds the distinction of having staged the first county fair in Michigan in October 1846. The first Michigan State Fair was held September 15-27, 1849, in Detroit. Michigan is the state with the oldest ongoing state fair in the United States. Michigan passed its first law incorporating fairs in 1855, and 1985 was the centennial of the Michigan Association of Fairs and Exhibitions.

## Fairs Are Fun

Exhibiting at a fair is fun! Whether it be a state, county, or a small club fair, it's a great way to learn. You learn how to grow good vegetable specimens and how to prepare and transport them. Through exhibiting you have the opportunity to share with others the knowledge you have gained and to see what others have grown. When the specimens are judged, you learn how well you have met certain approved standards and what you have to do next year to “make the best better.”

A list of classes to be used in an heirloom vegetable contest appears on page 38. For many of the classes, any heirloom variety of the vegetable can be used. Refer to pages 12 to 17 for a list of heirloom vegetable varieties.

Samples of forms that can be used in an heirloom vegetable contest appear on page 39.



*“The fairs should reach all farm children. And the significance of everything at a fair should be explained by a good teacher standing on the spot.”*

*Liberty Hyde Bailey - 1908*

# Heirloom Vegetable Classes

(All entries must be labeled as to variety.)

Class Number	Name of Class	Number of Specimens to Exhibit
1	a. Beans, snap—any heirloom variety	6 pods
	b. Beans, green shell—any heirloom variety	6 pods
	c. Beans, dry—any heirloom variety ( <i>Note: Beans are considered as one kind of vegetable.</i> )	½ cup
2	Beets—any heirloom variety	3 with or without tops
3	Cabbage—any heirloom variety	1 head with good wrapper leaves
4	Carrots—any heirloom variety	3 with or without tops
5	Corn—any heirloom variety	3 ears with husks
6	Cucumbers—any heirloom variety	3
7	Onions—any heirloom variety	3 well cured, not peeled, and with tops off
8	Parsnips—any heirloom variety	3 with or without tops
9	Potatoes—any heirloom variety	3
10	Pumpkin—any heirloom variety	1
11	Radishes—any heirloom variety	3 with or without tops
12	Squash, summer—any heirloom variety	2
13	Squash, winter—any heirloom variety	1
14	Tomatoes—any heirloom variety	6 small or 3 large
15	Turnips—any heirloom variety	3 with or without tops
16	Other—any other vegetable included in the heritage garden project not listed above	Refer to 4-H 1175, <i>Selecting Vegetables for Exhibit</i> , for exhibiting information
17	Largest pumpkin—heirloom variety Connecticut Field only (may be entered in Class 10 also)	( <i>Note: For classes 18, 19, 20, and 21, the number of specimens to exhibit will be the same as in classes 1 through 15. For additional information on exhibiting, see 4-H 1175, <i>Selecting Vegetables for Exhibit</i>.)</i>
18	Basket of vegetables—a collection of six or more kinds of vegetables included in the heritage garden project attractively displayed on a table space measuring 24 inches by 30 inches. Cut herbs may be used as greenery and may be kept fresh with hidden vials of water. More than one variety of each kind of vegetable may be used, but must be labeled.	
19	Old-fashioned wheelbarrow exhibit—a collection of 10 or more kinds of vegetables (minimum of 20 varieties; all labeled) included in the heritage garden project attractively displayed in an antique wheelbarrow. Cut herbs may be used as greenery and may be kept fresh with hidden vials of water. Limited to one exhibit per club or group.	
20	Largest number of vegetables—An award will be given to the exhibitor with the largest number of heirloom varieties exhibited.	
21	Educational exhibit—a collection of six or more kinds of vegetables included in the heritage garden project with one or more heirloom varieties and one or more modern varieties for each kind of vegetable.	

**Heritage Garden Project  
Entry Form**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

County \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Class #</b>	<b>Kind of Vegetable</b>	<b>Name of Variety</b>
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

**Heritage Fair**

Name of Club \_\_\_\_\_

Class No. \_\_\_\_\_

Description \_\_\_\_\_

Variety \_\_\_\_\_

Exhibitor Name \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



## Activities

**1.** Class 17 of the heirloom vegetable classes is for the largest pumpkin. If you want to enter this contest, keep in mind the story of Almonzo Wilder in the book *Farmer Boy* by Laura Ingalls Wilder. One year, Almonzo worked all summer to grow the biggest pumpkin for the county fair. To reach this goal, he used the milk-fed technique taught to him by his father. This is an old-time technique used to make a pumpkin increase in size. Almonzo's pumpkin did take first prize. Maybe your pumpkin can too! Here's how to do it:

- Pick out the best pumpkin vine in the garden. Snip off all the side shoots but one. Let one pumpkin form. After that remove all the other flowers.
- When the green pumpkin is the size of a large softball, take a knife and cut into a side of the vine about 3 inches from the pumpkin. Be careful not to cut through to the other side. Carefully insert a candle or lamp wick into the slit, making sure it is at least  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch firmly inside the vine.
- Make a hollow in the soil alongside the pumpkin. Place a bowl in the depression and fill the bowl with milk or sugar water (1 cup water mixed with 1 tablespoon sugar). Place the wick in the bowl. Cover with plastic so the soil and bugs stay out. Check every day to make sure the wick is still in the vine and that the milk hasn't gone sour. Replace the liquid when it's gone.
- Keep feeding until you are ready to pick your "prodigious pumpkin."



Should your pumpkin take first prize for the biggest at a fair, save the seeds to grow next year.

**2.** While your heirloom vegetables are on display at the fair, you could stage a demonstration of how beans are threshed.

Threshing means beating the seeds out of the pod. Beans are ready to be threshed when the leaves are dry and crispy. To thresh beans, place the dry, crisp plants in a tough cloth or burlap bag. Place the bag on a blanket or a tarp on a dry floor. The bag can be beaten with a flail (a tool used for threshing) or branches. To make a flail, take a broom handle or stick and drill a hole in one end. Use a smaller and thicker stick, and drill another hole in one end. Attach a rope through the holes. Now you are ready to flail.

When flailing the bag, be careful to break only the pods—not the beans. When the seeds are knocked out of the pods, pull out the stems and large parts from the bag, and dump the rest of the contents on the blanket or tarp. All the plant parts except the bean seeds are called chaff. To get rid of the chaff, have some members of your club circle the blanket or tarp, grab the edges, and toss it gently up and down outside in the breeze. Since the beans are heavier, they will drop back onto the blanket or tarp. The chaff will blow away. It will take several tosses to clean the beans.

You may want to put several varieties of heirloom beans (and/or peas) on display. Mix several colorful varieties together and package them attractively. Search for recipes in cookbooks if you want to make bean soup from your beans.

# More Heritage Gardening Activities

Following are additional heritage gardening activities to use throughout the year.

## Animal or Vegetable?

People have been decorating vegetables for years; it's another folk art. The vegetables won't last very long, but you will have enough time to have an exhibit and contest. Judge for the funniest, the cutest, the sweetest, the one that looks the most like someone famous, the most authentic (animal-like), the most original, etc. Use your imagination! Give ribbons to the winners and be sure to take pictures!

Here are some starter ideas:

- A cucumber with radish eyes becomes a caterpillar.
- A crookneck squash with bean seeds for eyes and a bean beak becomes a bird.
- A round squash with spinach or lettuce for hair, radishes for eyes, and a string bean for a mouth becomes someone you know.

## Bountiful Bean Tepee

A bean tepee is a wonderful hideaway on hot summer days. You can sit inside and enjoy the shade. Maybe you can even hear the beans grow! You will need poles that are 8 to 10 feet long and about 1 to 2 inches in diameter. Lash 6 poles together at the top and place them in a 4- to 6-foot circle. Stick each pole in the ground about 4 to 5 inches deep. Spread two of the poles a little apart where the doorway will be. Spread the others equally apart.

Plant five Scarlet Runner bean seeds around the outside of the poles, about every 4 inches except where the doorway is to be located. As these start growing, they may need help growing up the poles; so train the tendrils at the beginning.

Use string to make a mesh on three sides of the tepee. Leave an opening for the door. Now watch them grow. They may need a little extra water if the summer is dry.

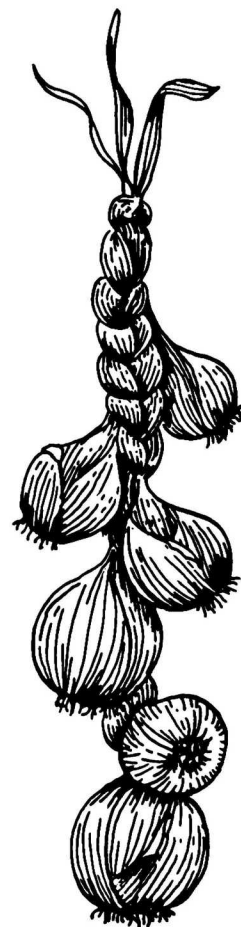
Ask your neighbors or family members if they ever made a bean tepee. See if they have any old photographs of tepees.

## Braiding Onions

An old and attractive way of storing onions is to braid them. You do this just after you harvest the onions while the tops are still pliable. Use twine to strengthen the tops. Braid the twine right in with the tops.

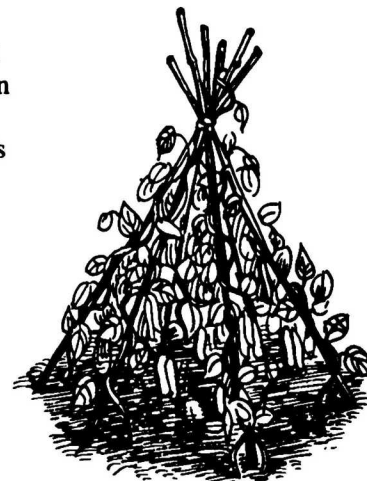
Choose three long-stemmed onions and tie these together at the top. Braid the onions just as you would braid hair. As the tops get shorter, work another onion in so you can keep braiding. At the end, loop the braid around and tie it off with twine.

Let the onions cure in a warm, well-ventilated shady spot. Then store them in a cool, dry, dark place. Bring one braid out at a time to your kitchen. These are pretty to look at and a handy way to store onions.



## Calligraphy Cress

In early spring lightly scratch your name in prepared soil. Plant cress seeds. They will germinate quickly, and in a few days you can behold your name in living green! You can harvest the cress in 7 to 10 days or when it's 4 inches high. You can also let it grow and use it as a seasoning.



## Cozy Cukes

It's fun to grow a cucumber or summer squash in a bottle: Search for a small cucumber in your garden and stick it in a *small-necked* clear glass bottle. (Bottles may have various shapes.) Be careful not to damage the stem or vine. Keep the bottle shaded at all times or the cuke will "cook" in the sun. Newspapers work well for shading. When the cuke reaches the bottom of the bottle, cut it off. To preserve your cucumber, add a pickling solution to the bottle.

## Gorgeous Gourds

Harvest your gourds with the stem still attached and store them in a cool dry place. Let them dry until the seeds rattle. If soft spots appear, throw them out since they are starting to rot. If they look moldy, *don't* throw them out; that is just part of the curing process. You may want to wash them in a borax solution. When the gourd is thoroughly mature, the outer skin mold can be scraped off.

The rich brown color underneath will show through. Now you can soak these in water and scrub with steel wool. Sanding and more scrubbing with steel wool will make them even more beautiful. Do not wax, varnish, or seal them in any way. Enjoy the natural colors.

Find out how other people in your community use the gourds they grow. Do they use them for noisemakers, birdhouses, rattles, or decorations? Take pictures of how the gourds are used.

## Monogrammed Pumpkins

You can monogram pumpkins or winter squash. When the pumpkin or squash is about the size of a large softball, write your name or initials on the skin with a ballpoint pen. Just lightly break through the skin about 1/8 inch deep. Space the letters about 1 inch apart.

As the pumpkin or squash continues to grow and ripen, the skin will grow back over the wound. The scar of the letters will be raised and rough.

## Plant Prints on Fabric

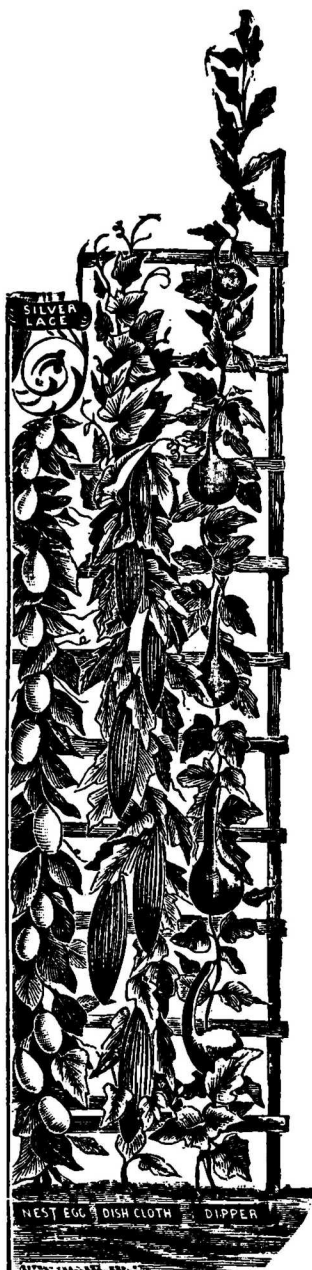
Use pressed plant materials and acrylic paint to perk up a T-shirt, individualize jeans, or create a decorative wall hanging.

### Materials Needed:

- **Plants and plant parts pressed flat** (such as vegetable leaves and flowers). These should be collected in advance and pressed flat between layers of nonglossy paper (such as newsprint or old phone books).
- **Acrylic paint in tubes**. These are available at stores having craft and art supplies. This paint is water soluble until dried. Printed items can be washed and dried as usual.
- **Paint brush assortment**—1/2-inch or 1-inch for leaves; soft watercolor type for delicate flowers.
- **Newspapers, container to mix paint** (oleo tubs), **paper towels, water, and sink** (or basin) for washing brushes.

### Procedure:

1. Spread a layer of newspaper on a clean, dry, flat surface. Have a pad of newspaper under the item to be painted. With T-shirts, insert a layer of paper so the paint won't bleed through.
2. Arrange plants in a pattern pleasing to you, and plan the order background to foreground. It is always possible to make changes but it will be easier if you have a scheme or theme in mind.
3. Use paint colors as they are from the tube or mix several to get the shade desired. Usually it is necessary to add a few drops of water to the tube paint. You can start with a color and then change it slightly by mixing it with another color. This provides a subtle variation and is an economic use of paint.



4. Using a clean sheet of newspaper, place the plant with side to be printed up. Brush on paint in the direction plant grows—from stem to tip and from stem to outside edge.
5. Place the painted plant material on the fabric with the painted side down. Cover this with a layer of newspaper. Press with your hands, making sure that the entire painted surface has been pushed onto the fabric. Remove the newspaper carefully from the bottom and discard. Remove the plant material and set it aside to dry as it can be used again.
6. Continue this process. Wait between each printing for the previous paint to dry.
7. Flowers are done in two steps. First position the stem in the design. When the stem is dry, add the flower, which is usually a different color.
8. Highlights, fruits, etc., can be added later.
9. If you wish, you can paint your 4-H club name across the top.

**NOTE:** It is important to keep your fingers clean at all times. Brushes should be carefully washed quickly before the paint dries. Keep in mind that the paint dries very fast.

### Potato and Onion Prints

If you are sending out invitations for your harvest festival, you might want to fancy them up a bit. North American Indians used this simple printing technique to stamp designs on their splint baskets. If you cut an onion in half crosswise, you will see the circle of leaves inside. Make prints with these onion halves by dipping the cut half in ink (a stamp pad works fine) or watercolor paint. Press the onion several times onto a piece of paper and you will have a beautiful print.

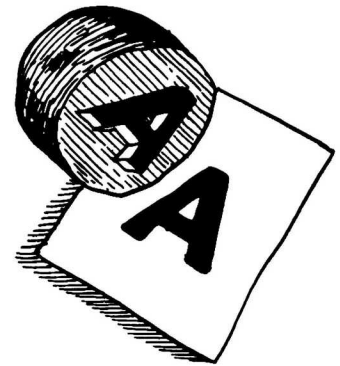
By cutting a potato in half you can make letters or designs. Draw the design on the potato half with a pencil. Then use a knife to cut away the portion around the letter. Your letter will then be raised. Use this as a stamp.

It's fun to make wrapping paper for Christmas with your vegetable prints. Use several colors on plain white or brown craft paper.

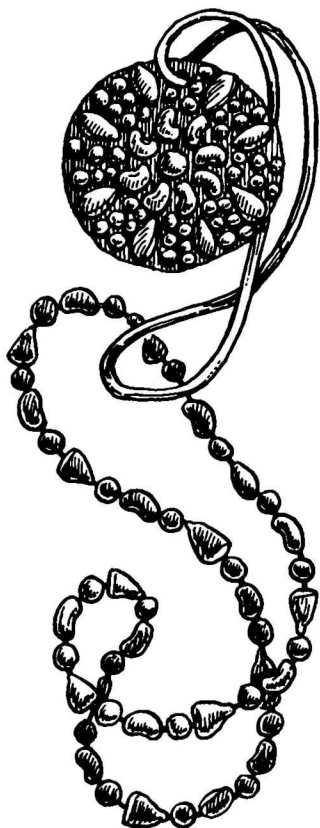
### Pumpkin People

Using corn stalks, dry weeds, leaves, and bundles of wheat, make legs, arms and a body. Use a pumpkin for a head. If you use cut-out paper eyes, nose, and mouth, it will last longer. Or you can mark these on with paint or felt pens. Cut out a hole in the bottom of the pumpkin. Place a stick or broom handle in this hole. Put the long end of the stick down through the bundle of cornstalks (or other material) that make up the body. Now tie tightly.

You may want to “dress” your pumpkin person or just leave it bare. Have a pumpkin person contest. Be sure to take pictures.







## Seed Medallions

These attractive medallions made of seeds are beautiful to wear. Smaller versions can be used for Christmas tree ornaments.

- Some attractive seeds to use include:
- corn (yellow and ornamental varieties)
  - popcorn
  - sunflower seeds
  - split green peas
  - kidney beans
  - navy beans

Start with a plain thin cardboard circle and lay the seeds of different colors in a pleasing pattern. Make a sketch of this pattern on paper.

Punch a hole at the top of the cardboard. Put a heavy coating of white glue on the surface and arrange the seeds on the glue. Different sections of the design may be outlined with colored string if desired. After the medallion is completely dry, spray it with a crystal clear glaze.

Make a 36-inch loop of yarn, leather thong, or shoelace. Run the loop through the hole for wearing around your neck.

For Christmas tree decorations, make 1½-inch circles. Make a 4-inch loop for hanging them on the tree.

These can be made in many shapes. Use your imagination!

## Sun Prints

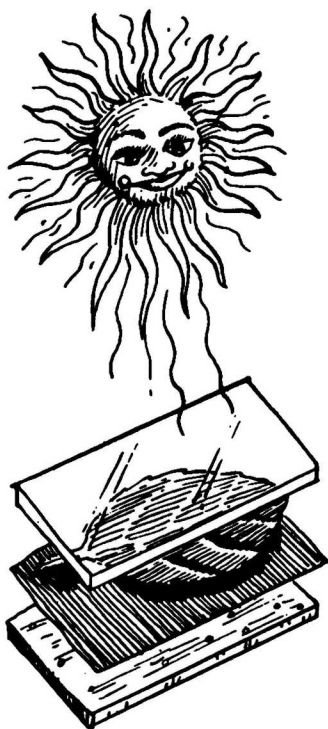
This activity is quick and lots of fun. Leaves of vegetables will yield a finely-detailed print that is good enough for a plant identification contest.

### Materials:

- Blueprint paper (cut into 8½-inch by 11-inch pieces) available from architects or drafting supply houses. Do not expose to light. Or you can purchase sun-print paper from a craft supply store.
- Heavy cardboard (cut into 12-inch-square pieces)
- Clothespins (snap-type)
- Sunlight
- Leaves, flowers, and seeds from your garden
- Plexiglas (cut into 12-inch-square pieces). This is available from hardware stores.

### Directions:

1. Gather the materials from your garden; flat items will make more detailed prints.
2. Place blueprint paper on top of a piece of cardboard. Have the white side down and the blue side up.
3. Arrange your garden items on top of the blueprint paper (the blue side).
4. On top of the arrangement, lay a piece of Plexiglas. Use clothespins to fasten the four layers together around the edges.
5. Expose the top arrangement (blue side of paper) to the sunlight. Expose until the visible paper has lost most of its color.
6. Separate the layers and rinse the blueprint paper in water to “fix” the print.
7. Dry the prints in a flat position.



## Seed Necklaces

Bean and pumpkin seeds and corn kernels can be combined to make beautiful necklaces. Soak them in cold water overnight. Drain them on a towel. Thread a large-eyed needle with strong thread or dental floss. You will need a strand 24 to 30 inches long. (It should be long enough to put your head through.) While the seeds and kernels are still soft, push the needle through them, one at a time. Take both ends of the thread, pull them tightly together, and tie.

# References

The following books are helpful for both leaders and members. Included are books on growing and cooking vegetables. You should be able to find many of these at your local library or bookstore.

- Bales, Suzanne Frutig. *Ready, Set, Grow: A Guide to Gardening With Children*. New York: Macmillan, 1996. (Includes a description and photos of the 4-H Children's Garden at Michigan State University.)
- Creasy, Rosalind. *Blue Potatoes, Orange Tomatoes*. San Francisco, CA: Sierra Club Books, 1994. (A great book for the young, beginning gardener.)
- Creasy, Rosalind. *Cooking From the Garden*. San Francisco, Calif.: Sierra Club Books, 1988. (Garden information and cooking using heirloom and ethnic vegetables)
- Eames-Sheavly, Marcia. *The Great American Peanut* (4-H Leader's Guide 142LM16), *The Humble Potato* (4-H Leader's Guide 142LM17) and *The Three Sisters* (4-H Leader's Guide 142LM15). Ithaca, NY: Cornell Cooperative Extension. (A three-part series on horticulture and human culture.)
- Jabs, Carolyn. *The Heirloom Gardener*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1984. (Includes information on collecting and growing old and rare varieties of vegetables and fruits)
- Johnston, Robert Jr. *Growing Garden Seeds*. Albion, Maine: Johnny's Selected Seeds, 1983. (A good beginning book on saving seed)
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- Riotte, Louis. *Carrots Love Tomatoes*. Pownal, Vt.: Garden Way Publishing, 1975. (A guide to companion planting)
- Rogers, Marc. *Saving Seeds: The Gardener's Guide to Growing and Storing Vegetable and Flower Seeds*. Pownal, Vt.: Storey Communications, Inc., 1990.
- Walker, Barbara M. *The Little House Cookbook: Frontier Foods from Laura Ingalls Wilder's Classic Stories*. New York: Harper & Row, 1979. (Section on "Foods from Gardens and Orchards" is excellent; includes many heirloom varieties)
- Waters, Marjorie. *The Victory Garden Kids' Book*. Old Saybrook, CT: The Globe Pequot Press, 1994. (A good, basic, beginning vegetable gardening book.)
- Watson, Benjamin. *Taylor's Guide to Heirloom Vegetables*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1996.
- Wilder, Laura Ingalls. *Little House in the Big Woods, Farmer Boy, Little House on the Prairie, On the Banks of Plum Creek, By the Shores of Silver Lake, The Long Winter, Little Town on the Prairie, These Happy Golden Years*. New York: Harper & Row, 1932-1943. (The collection of "Little House" books makes excellent background reading)

The following publications are available from your county MSU Extension office or from the MSU Bulletin Office, 10B Agriculture Hall, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan 48824-1039:

- 4-H 1175, *Selecting Vegetables for Exhibit*
- 4-H 1329, *Foodways: A 4-H Folkpatterns Project*



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