

# SEED SAVERS' NETWORK

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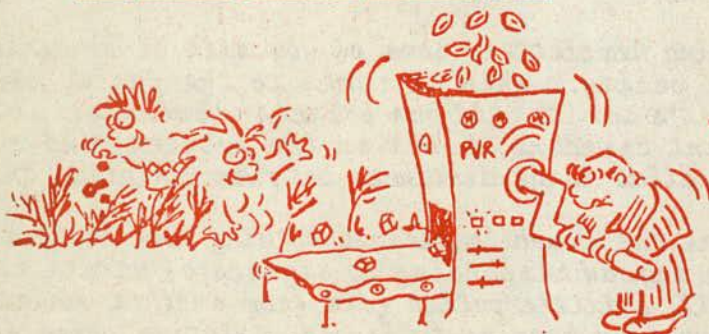
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## THE PLANT VARIETY RIGHTS BILL



The Bill was passed in the Senate in February this year. The Liberal and National parties supported the Government's bill. We were planning to include a number of lengthy extracts from Hansard, but it was turning out very long, dull, and familiar. As of 1st April this year, there are more than 100 paying members, 20 non-financial but valued heirloom-seed-contributing members, and there have been several hundred other written enquiries.

\*\*\*\* UNDER P.V.R. IT IS NOT ILLEGAL TO SAVE SEEDS NOR TO PASS THEM ON \*\*\*\*

## INTRODUCTION

Since March 1986, the Seed Savers' Network has started going public. The idea was catchy. Everyone could see that seed saving is a simple task.

Some people were excited about the possibility of saving seeds from their own garden and experimenting with other gardeners' idea (as Brian Koop from Heidelberg wrote to us).

To give you an idea of the extent of the response, we received around 350 letters from all over Australia. Many people were friendly enough to tell us about their growing conditions and what sort of weather they have had.

For us gardeners/farmers, it is never boring to hear about the weather, as we are so dependent on it for our survival. El Nino, a warm Pacific current, and its associated low pressure systems has been blamed for not delivering that wet mass it taws behind it. It is interesting to note that, although most of the coastal areas were suffering from the drought, people in the West were actually complaining about excessive wet weather.

So, if you feel you had a very bad year for seed growing, don't be discouraged. It happened to most of us. We all had a fair share of trouble!



In September 1986 S.S.N. was given a whole bunch of tomato seedlings in little 10 cm pots. These included over 100 different varieties, which had originated from the seed collection of the Hungarian Botanical Gardens.

At that time we were teaching gardening in Brisbane Public Schools - all very practical. We were introducing edible gardens as an art form to disadvantaged city school students, and starting teaching gardens in the school yard itself. We were very pleased to receive this response: "On behalf of the staff and pupils of this school, I wish to express my thanks to Michel and Jude Fanton for the fine work they did at this school in connection with "Edible Gardens as Art" during the past ten weeks, and to the Seed Savers' Network for support... I understand that all of the seeds used in these projects were donated by your organisation. In view of the highly successful outcomes, I would like to thank your members for their generosity. I can assure you that all of the seeds used were put to good purpose." L.E. Partington, Principal, East Brisbane State School, Qld.

We were coming back to our gardens/residence down south every two weeks to save seeds at maturity and keep our large gardens alive, air the house and feed the chooks. One weekend we had to transplant 67 varieties. For that we had to dig holes at least two metres apart to preserve the purity of the seeds, tag every variety and record it in an exercise book. We gave twenty varieties to neighbours willing to look after them, then another twenty to gardener/seed savers we met at markets we attended.

We have a good fence (wallaby-, cow-, bandicoot-proof), great neighbours, who watered the little tomato plants twice a week, and all the plants stayed alive while we were busy in the "big smoke".

Some of you might have had to wait over a month for an answer and seeds and we apologize again: that is because we picked up mail from Box 24 only every two weeks.

Now it is all better. We are renting an office space every Thursday in Nimbin village to answer mail and carry on "paper work". The Nimbin Neighbourhood Centre, next door, will take any telephone messages (066 891492).

Over the last year, we must have distributed over 1500 samples of seeds, all non-hybrids, many not commercially available.

After reading this bulletin, and the Spring Newsletter, some of you will be wondering if we are becoming champions of plant purity. When it comes to the purity of a variety, we do get a little bigotted, let's admit. All our sources (botanists, old farmers, professional and amateur plant breeders, books on the subject) and our experience, indicate that it is wise to allow large distances between varieties that are likely to cross.

Noone says you should keep your plant pure and immobile because nothing ever is, least so cultivated plants. They will change anyway responding to signals of Nature e.g. more CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere, change of soil, a little pollen from another variety. It is true to say that many gardeners have been keeping their old varieties going for generations without too much isolation, or fuss. Unlike us newcomers, they know their variety: maybe they have found only one variety of each vegetable that is suited to their taste and environment and they kept growing that one.

If there was an accident with crossing, then they would detect it in the next generation, being so familiar with their favourite vegetable; they would rogue out everything that was not in the spirit of the variety.

All old seed savers have a fantastic eye for individualism in plants. That is why we emphasize the role that older people can play in this project. They are the ones to pass on these heirlooms.

Jude and Michel Fanton.

TO MY SON ROGER, I BEQUEATH MY  
LEBANESE ZUCCHINI, MY DAUGHTER  
ABBEY; MY PRIZE CELERY AND TO  
MY LIFELONG COMPANION ARTHUR....





## BIO-REGIONAL GARDENS

We have received seeds from many regions of Australia and on trialling them all, it becomes obvious that what grows well in Tasmania, does not thrive here in Northern N.S.W.

The question arises, why should we encourage the swapping of seed between grossly different regions?

The main reason is that people find they cannot find the particular seeds they require in their vicinity and so they have to look further afield.

On the one hand, we have letters from gardeners who have saved seeds for countless years and on the other, gardeners who want to start saving seeds but haven't the initial stock. Our role is to put them in touch with one another, no matter from where they are writing. Often we re-direct seeds sent to us, to people in need.

It is about time for bio-regional preservation gardens to be set up in as many areas as possible. For this we need serious gardeners willing to trial everything that is coming into the network, and it is time-consuming. They would have to be financially independent, have a lot of free time, and, most importantly, be very committed to the preservation of older varieties.

Their gardens would be living museums where members of the public could come and view the diversity of crops that flourish in that region. The Bi-centennial next year will increase people's awareness of their heritage. Maybe you could even apply to your local council for funding through its Bi-centennial committee.



## NATIVE SPECIES

### Useful to Humans

Interview with Ron Williams, Plant Introduction Manager, C.S.I.R.O.,  
St. Lucia, Brisbane  
Wednesday, 30th July 1986

RON: There are very few native species in Australia which really are related to the established crop plants of the Old World, but there are some and I think they are important.

The mung bean that is used for sprouting has a native species related to it: it used to be called *Vigna mungo* in Australia but now we know it has *Vigna radiata* (variety sub-rodota) and that is very closely related to the mung bean used for sprouting right through S.E. Asia and the East generally. That occurs from the very northern parts of N.S.W. right up to the top end of the Northern Territory.

That's one thing. Then there is another called horse gram, which is not known by Europeans very much as a food plant, but is used in Asia quite a lot. It is a plant called *Macrotiloma uniflorum*, used to be called *Dolichos biflorus*. There are native varieties of that, which occur from about central Queensland up to the Gulf Country. There are native species of rice occurring in the north west of the Kimberleys, but they are a little bit distant from the real cultivated crops.

MICHEL: Could they be used for breeding?

RON: I don't think it's known, Michel. It's not known whether they are close enough to be used for breeding. As far as I know they have never been properly collected and no attempt has been made to use them for breeding.

The other group would be sorghum, but the Australian sorghum is not very close. Again, there is some problem with cross-breeding. Now I'm talking about things related to the major field crops rather than orchard and field varieties.

MICHEL: What about Tobacco?

RON: I didn't want to talk about it as it is not a food crop and I don't know whether it is really a moral crop (laughter).



Australia has a lot of *Nicotiana* species, the genus to which tobacco belongs, and they have been collected by American collectors for use in plant breeding (mainly for disease resistance).

The other group is the native *Solanum* species group. These grow in open scrub and fringe-of-rainforest country. *Solanums* are a very important source of steroids used in making the Pill.

MITCHEL: Which *solanum*?

RON: *Solanum aviculare* is one of them, but there are about a half a dozen of them. There are a number of species which are the same species as used for steroid production in the southern part of the U.S.S.R. and the Balkan countries. They are not being used in Australia.



### SEED SAVING TECHNIQUES

1. Amongst authors who write about seed saving, there are many differences of opinion when it comes to recommending safe distances to keep varieties pure (i.e. to stop cross-pollination with others in the species, or with wild relatives). For example, we have members who are breeding tomatoes. Because tomatoes are self-pollinated (male and female in the same flower) there is not a great necessity to separate one variety from the next. If grown side by side, there may be a 2% crossing, but at 2 metres that reduced to next to nothing. Professional plant breeders separate them by 20 metres to maintain absolute purity. A very old rare strain of lettuce may require extra care over saving seeds from an ordinary Great Lakes, but 2 metres is fine for lettuces, too.

2. Also, when it comes to deciding from how many plants, or how many fruits, you should save seeds for variability's sake, there are different recommended practices: For cross-pollinated crops, be sure to save seed from several individual plants, even if only a few seeds are needed. The exception is the Cucurbit family, where in-breeding does not seem to matter: you can save seed from only one fruit for next year's crop. See Corn Seed Proposal for the corn story. It is of less importance from how many plants or fruits you save seeds for cross-pollinated crops.

3. Characteristics to Maintain and Encourage: Each vegetable has a specific part for which it is grown e.g. root (carrots), stem (celery), leaf (lettuce), fruit (tomato), and seed (Lima bean). It is for that characteristic that you should select. You would also consider flavour, earliness (quickness to mature), resistance to diseases and pests, life in storage, and ability to self-seed in the garden.

4. Biennial plants: these take two years before they produce seed. This group includes Brussels sprouts, cabbages, cauliflowers, collards, kale and kohlrabi. These are varieties of one species, *Brassica oleraceae*, and cross readily with one another and with wild mustard. Therefore plan to save seed of one kind at a time. You will need two or more plants of whatever kind you select.



5. Self-pollinated means the process of pollination occurs within each flower, with no pollen transferred from one flower to another (on the same plant or between plants). The Nightshade family - tomatoes, eggplant, capsicums, chillies and potatoes is self-pollinated. Occasionally an insect will cross two varieties, however. Tomatoes are the least likely to cross, capsicums and chillies, and eggplants more likely. If you grow capsicums and chillies for seed, be sure they are planted as far apart as possible. All of these fruit should be harvested when they are fully mature, a bit later than when you would normally plan to eat them.

6. Cucurbits - a case for hand pollination: Pollination is usually done by insects. The male flowers are borne on long stems, and the female flowers are borne with a small preliminary fruit (ovary) normally attached to the vine.

Cucurbits are divided into four species and all varieties in each of the species will cross with one another. e.g. Hubbards will cross with Queensland Blue because they are members of the maxima species; but butternut will not cross with any of these. We printed tables showing what Cucurbits were what, in the Spring Newsletter last year. If you would like a photocopy, please send a S.A.S.E.

If there are others in the same species grown within a bee's flight area (up to two kilometres), you will have to hand pollinate. We can often be seen running around the garden with ladies parti-hose, in the late afternoon. We are looking for the flowers that will be likely to open in the morning. Here's the procedure:

Put a "foot" on the female and another foot on a male and close off with a twist tie or masking tape. Next morning take the parti-hose off, cut the male flower off and rub it onto the centre of the female flower. Cover again for a couple of days and mark it maybe with the twist tie. One of the beauties of the parti-hose is that it will stretch as your fruit develops, if you forget to remove it.

7. Extra precautions for specific vegetables:

a. Extra care needed with cross-pollination: corn (wind pollinated) keep varieties separate by 70m to 300m; cucurbits (insect-pollinated) separate 70m - 1,000m; beetroot, silverbeet, Swiss chard (insect) up to 2,000m; cabbage family (insect) 70m; turnips, mustard, Chinese cabbage also 70m.

b. Will cross-pollinate with weeds: carrots parsley, chicory, lettuce, parsnip.

c. Dry on the plant before harvesting: celery, carrots, parsley, radish, parsnip; onions, leeks, shallots; corn; okra; lettuce, Chinese cabbage and Brassica families; beetroot, silver beet; peas and beans (harvest and expose the immature pods underneath to the sun).

d. Seeds need to be harvested every few days: celery, carrots, parsnips, lettuce, cabbage. This would apply particularly in wet weather.

Alternatively, you can harvest the whole stalk when most seeds are mature and hang for a few days to dry.

e. Ferment the seeds for a few days in their own juices: tomatoes, cucumbers, melons.

f. Put the seeds in water and reject the floaters: Cucurbits, tomatoes, asparagus, and eggplant.

g. Keep only the plumpest seed: Cucurbits, corn, beans, peas.

h. Dry extra well before storing: lettuce, cabbage family, beans, peas, corn, radish.

Then there's spinach which has plants that could be female, hermaphrodite, a small early bolting male, and a vegetative male with no flowers. The best plants for seed are the first two. The seeds themselves are actually whole fruits, little clumps with several embryos inside.



## TOMATOES

As mentioned in the Introduction, we had a tomato garden this summer and it was a bit tricky not to mix up varieties at any stage. Some varieties were very sturdy, staking type (determinate). Otherwise they were the running type and that means they do not stop their growth after fruiting; they keep on throwing more shoots and flowers. We hilled all tomatoes.

At harvest time we picked the tomatoes into ice-cream containers, wrote the names on with markers and wheelbarrowed the lot to the garage for processing.



We cut each tomato's bottom and squeezed it into the container, making sure no seeds hopped accidentally into another container.

Three days of fermentation later they really smelt bad and it was about time to get them out. Fermentation cleans the seed of its jelly coating and helps get rid of some seed-borne diseases.

At the garden tap we tipped the seed through a tea strainer (the tea never did taste the same after that), having removed the pulp floating on the top, and ran water through until it was completely clean.

Newspaper sheets seemed the best to dry the seeds then large envelopes pegged to a line on the verandah for ten days.

The last stage involved putting them in smaller envelopes to store in glass jars ready for distribution.

Coming as they did from a cool climate, these tomatoes would very likely be cold resistant. If you would like some to try, now in the cooler months, write to us, stating whether you would like a salad or cooking type, a yellow, pink or red coloured one, and large, medium or small. The list would be too large to print here, and it is full of very long names, e.g. Kecskemeti Uveghazi, Holger Suhns Markt and Leningradskii Skorospelyi. They were collected mostly from Czechoslovakia, U.S.S.R., G.D.R., Hungary and U.S.A. by the Hungarian Botanic Gardens.



FREE RANGE TOMATO

The NSW Minister for Agriculture said at tomato-tasting trials recently that the Floradale tomato would be more suited for use in cricket practice than for the table.

This is the insipid, tough-skinned tomato we see on supermarket shelves all year round.

The old-fashioned types have beautiful tastes and textures. Tomatoes are most often cited as having suffered from modern breeding programmes.

## CORN SEED PROPOSAL

In the Spring '86 newsletter we recommended sending a hundred corn seeds. We know that this is a small sample to start saving from, and that it only gives a restricted picture of the variety. Each variety is made up of a multitude of individuals, whose genes are reshuffled every year, with cross-pollination. By selecting, say, only sixty cobs for seeds of those hundred plants, the genetic make-up will narrow. If you do this for several years running, your corn will flower later and later, with the consequent danger of more insect infestation, and become deformed.

The Seed Savers' Exchange of U.S.A. says of this:

"The number of plants in a field affects the genetic stability of a variety. Over time, if too few parent plants contribute offspring to the next generation, then the crossing of related plants results in a decrease in vigor (inbreeding depression) and loss of variation. If a population has a particular gene which occurs about one time in one hundred and only 20 plants are grown out to produce seed for the next generation, then chances are better than two in three that the rare gene will be lost.



In general, it is best to select not just on the basis of ears, but by looking at the whole plant. It is not rare for a borer-infested, half-broken, diseased plant to produce as good an ear as a sturdy, healthy plant, but the poorer plant is likely to have offspring of inconsistent quality. Even better than selecting on the basis of one plant is the principle of basing selection on the overall performance of related plants. A simple way to do this is to plant a field such that each row comes from a different ear, making sure to reserve some seed from each ear to use in planting next year's field (you will have kept the seeds on their cobs last season). At the end of the season, each row is evaluated and the seed that was set aside from the ears that produced the best rows is planted the next year.



At the end of the second year, the grower chooses ears from the best plants in the field and starts the cycle over again. In choosing plants for the next cycle, the grower should avoid selecting too many plants from one row. By having related plants together in rows, it is easier to maintain genetic diversity, because the grower can make sure not to select too many plants that are closely related.

Here are a couple of other bits of advice about selection. 1) Some plant characteristics are not easy to see by the time the plants dry down (first brood corn borer damage, leaf color, time of pollen shed). With colored tags or ribbons around the main stalk, it is simple to mark plants with desired traits and find them at harvest without lots of record-keeping. 2) Selection is more effective if undesirable plants can be stopped from shedding pollen and crossing with the other plants. Some unwanted traits, such as disease susceptibility, insect feeding, poor plant form and early or late silking, can be seen before pollen is shed. Tassels can be removed from these plants before they have a chance to contribute pollen to the next generation."

(Article by Mark P. Widrlechner, Ph.D. in 1984 Winter Yearbook of the Seed Savers' Exchange, U.S.A.)

Few gardeners can afford enough space to let over hundred corn cobs grow to maturity. So we propose that we coordinate several people growing a variety, to send in their seed. We will mix it all together and redistribute them. Twenty gardeners keeping ten cobs each is just the same as one gardener keeping two hundred.

This need happen only every five years for each variety.

This year we will start with two varieties: -miniature pencil pop corn, a quick-maturing many-coloured popping corn, and super sweet Mexican sweet corn. Step forward if you would like to join the "corn network" by receiving and propagating these seeds.

### POTATO PATCH

We have replanted all the potatoes that we grew last year (13 varieties).

We will have enough to distribute by mid 1987. They are in the ground now as we have virtually no frost. They are: Atlantic, Bismark (blue skin), Blue Victor, Coliban, Conchita, Delaware, Exton, Kufri Jyoti, Patrones, Red la Sada, Tarrago, Tasman, and Up-to-Date.

We are thinking of making them available locally, at markets to members; but if you are really keen to have a particular one, could you work out the way that it could be sent to you?

Royce Wiles of Bowning NSW, sent us an excellent article on breeding potatoes from seeds. If you would like a copy, we would be very happy to send you a copy.



## WHEN DOES A VARIETY RUN OUT?

Some experienced gardeners have found that they have to buy seeds every four years or so because their variety ran out, as they say. They mean, the strain went downhill instead of keeping nice and steady as it should. Weediness, quickness to bolt and small fruiting bodies are characteristic of running out. Strangely enough it does not usually happen to beans and tomatoes but rather to some lettuce, chicory or carrots.

If seed saving is done correctly, a strain new to the environment will be up and down anyway for a few years in order to adapt itself, and for the gardener to make the most of its habits. Any one or all of these reasons may be why your variety runs out:

1. Your variety has been crossed with a wild relative e.g. carrots with Queens Ann's Lace; Lettuce with *Lactuca canadensis*, Quinoa with fat hen; Amaranth with a wild spiny one.
2. Your variety was crossed before it reached you. This did not show up on the seeds, but does in your plants.
3. In the case of corn and sunflower, too few specimens have been saved for seed and inbreeding occurs. (See "Corn Seed Proposal")
4. You have crossed two varieties and they have become unstable (See "Seed Saving Techniques")
5. Sometimes a climate is so harsh and so different from the original habitat that, although it will grow well enough, it will not reproduce happily. Here, in northern NSW we can grow cauliflowers but not for seed. So, your area may be unsuitable for growing for seed saving of a particular species, as opposed to growing for production.

## OVERSEAS SEED AID

In our last publication we were talking about sending surplus seed to less lucky farmers in the third world, whose lives had been so disrupted by war and famine that they had to eat their breeding stock. We were fortunate to have some friends who were going to the Solomon Islands with good contacts, and they took seed with them.

We had a letter from Eric Early, an experienced nurseryman from Alstonville, N.S.W., who is working in Nicaragua at the town of Achaupa. He was asking for 1 kg packs of seeds for his village vegetable gardens to be sent to the Australian Embassy in Managua. We understood the urgency of the problem, but did not have seed in that quantity, so we sent thirty samples for him and his friends to try, and find out which was the best for local conditions. Next we shall send clear instructions on how to keep varieties vigorous, to be translated by our friend, along with bulk seeds of the most appropriate vegetables for that area.

Here are some extracts from Eric's letter:

"I'm working for CEPA-a country wide organization that gets finance from abroad and organises projects in Nicaragua. I am a builder/agricultural advisor for the Lepartillo co-op and the collectives around Achaupa. They want to establish citrus orchards on the collectives and want me to start a nursery for them and teach them how to bud and graft.

There is a great drive here for self-reliance in food and a great shortage of seeds. We are about 30 Kilometres from the Honduran border. Every night three of the Co-op men keep guard with Sten guns. Last year the Contras, 600, attacked this co-op, burnt down the school and killed over 14 men, women and children. I wondered, why the woman with the family where I live had such a sad, pensive, resigned expression on her face most of the time. Her actions are all slow, deliberate and she makes tortillas with such precision, clapping, turning and clapping them between her hand again and again. Her husband and daughter died defending this co-op in the Contra attack."



We received this letter from Dr. Rob Condon of the Hospitals Board in Thursday Island just as we were going to press:

"I am working as community medical officer in the Torres Straits, between Queensland and New Guinea.

Many Island councils are interested in establishing community and family gardens but have no access to vegetable seeds.

I am writing to you to see if you can provide us with vegetable seeds at a reduced price, appropriate to the inhabitants of this area."

If you know of any aid group based in Australia, that could channel some of our seed samples and information to needy villagers, please let us know.

Many people may wonder why the poorer countries from which so many of our species come, are lacking planting material. Seeds don't take heat well. In hot, humid climates they need to be replanted each year. Disruption of the social fabric, by resettlement and war as well as famine, means seeds are lost.

Technically, seed saving is totally suited to a poor village, as it requires no fandangled equipment.

There is an old saying that goes: "Give someone a loaf of bread and you will have fed them for a day. Give them some garden seeds, they will be fed for a season. Give them seeds and teach them how to save the seeds, they will be fed for life." from Maureen Walsh.

### COOKING

It is all very well to have a network of folks saving seeds and passing them on to gardeners who would otherwise not have access to them. But genetic preservation of cultivated species will become a cultural event when people develop the taste for the products of heirloom seeds.

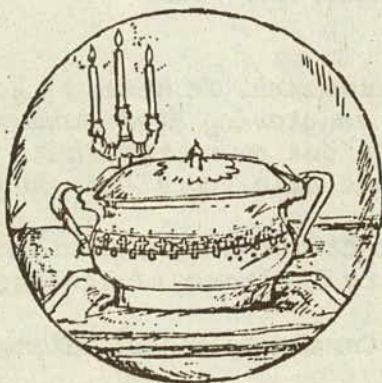
We can predict that cooking with heirlooms will be not just a restaurant-trendy phase, where small squashes of red lettuces come into demand for just a few years, but rather a better way of eating every day.

At our place we sometimes have a dozen different green lettuces in the salad bowl: oakleaf, open-hearted ones, rabbit's ear, butterhead, endive, brown, the All-Year-Round, as well as sorrel, chicories, lamb's quarters and many herbs.

All the kids love tossed salad. This is how we dress it for the table:

- \* the secret is to use mustard paste which is available quite cheaply, and incorporate as much as you like with vinegar, cider or wine types being the best, or lemon juice
- \* combine your favourite salad oil by agitating with a whisk, or in a jar
- \* add crushed garlic, onions or bulb shallots, salt and pepper.

As a general rule, heirloom vegetables are more tender and more tasty than modern varieties and need less cooking. Heavy bottomed pots and an old fashioned wood fire make the best meals, but we are not all able to have such luxuries.



\*\*\*\* PULL A WEED, PLANT A SEED \*\*\*\*

(old saying given by Sue Bingham)



# LETTERS



The S.S.N. has had about four hundred letters over the last year and the diversity has been truly fantastic. Here are a few lines from just a few people to give you a notion of the kind of people that write, their interests and their directions. We hope they do not mind finding themselves in print; if you think we have used too much space for this section, let us know.

"Now that P.V.R. has been passed in the Senate, the need for people like you is even more paramount and maybe its passing is actually a good thing because it may make people more aware of the varieties which are not there!...

When I was living in Brunswick (inner suburb of Melbourne) the varieties of vegetables were quite remarkable. The Turks were among the best gardeners, followed closely by the Maltese...

Yes, I do have 101 varieties of apples - or at least had - I now have 98 - three died this year...

I have obtained my apples from 6 existing sources, and primarily from a local nursery which does not deal with mail order, so does not want national exposure. He has potentially approx. 175 varieties, but only propagates what the customer wants. The Huon Horticultural Research Station in Hobart has a list of approx. 320 varieties which they can supply scions for grafting or budding from... Some of my apples are quite rare, including Court Pendu Plat - dating from pre-1600. It flowers very, very late and thus escapes frost...

The crop of the more unusual fruit this year includes Mutsu, Cornish Aromatic, Prince Edward, Crofton, Legana, Stewart's Seedling, Flue Crown, Newton Greenpippin and Tokewood. Some only have one apple on them, so it's going to be fun to taste it.

The enclosed lettuce seeds are from a woman, who discovered them at Vandoit, Vic, a very harsh place. It is quite remarkable - it is drought tolerant, frost tolerant and doesn't go bitter when stressed. It selfseeds prolifically and once you've allowed one to go to seed, it will pop up even in amongst pasture grasses! She thinks it may have come into Victoria with the Chinese during the gold rush. We love it!...

I hope many more will discover you and support you (both!!)"

Bruce Hedge, Newham, Vic.

\* \* \*

"I am very interested in developing non-commercial varieties of apples. In particular early and late season and varieties resistant to fungal diseases."

Mal Eden, Healesville Vic.

\* \* \*

"Lynall Hall Community School is a state high school in Brunswick. We heard of your group through a friend of our teachers' and are interested in growing food producing plants which used to be available in Melbourne. We have our own cafe where we occasionally cook lunches for the school, and to this end are also educating younger students on nutrition.

If there are no seed banks or contacts we would also like to create these with a local Community Group in Brunswick known as C.E.R.E.S. (Community Environment Resources Education Scheme)."

Lynall Hall Community School, Brunswick,

\* \* \*



"Hope some of the hopi corn I sent you sprouted and that you can keep the line going. The viability was real poor. Several years old. Only a few of mine sprouted, and maybe, just maybe, I'll get some seed, depending on the frost. Can get frost here any time."

Joe Schwarz, Bungendore, NSW

\*Yes they sprouted and we had a good crop. A limited quantity of this black grinding corn are available for spring planting.

\* \* \*

"I was wondering whether it is worth establishing a "cold temperate network" for those of us who live in colder climates. I would be prepared to stick my neck out and look after organisation this end."

Mark Neyland, c/-P.O. Nubeera, Tas. 7184

\*What a wonderful offer! It could fit well into Bio-regional Gardens Scheme (see later).

\* \* \*

"A friend of mine, now in his late 70s, as a boy and youth helped his older brothers work tomato fields around the Bendigo Vic. district. Tomatoes were their only crop and ever since he specialises in them as a hobby, collecting seed of different types. A variety that disappeared for about 30 years and he came across in a garden in Northern Victoria recently, is TATINTA: a large dwarf type. This was a cross of Burwood Wonder and Intermediate. He had a successful crop last year from the seed and looks good for this year.

Another older variety is MERBEIN MONARCH: dwarf type with large flat tomatoes, does not bear many but will go up to a pound in weight."

Barbara Yates, Richmond, Vic.

\* \* \*

"This year I have 30 varieties of tomato but my section is just too small to grow much and we have such a very short season...I am at retiring age and would like to spend the next 20 or 30 years growing and saving the precious vegetable seeds for future generations. I can think of no better project to do."

Mrs. Merle Jennesa, Waenuiomata, N.Z.

\* \* \*

"Through Reny Slay of the Permaculture Institute I have heard that you are involved with a seed exchange network in Australia...I am interested in all aspects of operating a seed exchange, setting up seed

banks since I undertook to initiate the Tasman Permaculture Seed Exchange some time in 1985."

Dieter Proebst, Motueka, N.Z.

\* \* \*

"My family has treasured an extremely good type of climbing bean from white seeds. Verbal family history records that my paternal grandparents were growing this bean over 100 years ago and seed has been saved and handed around among the family and others during the years...I have picked beans from a step-ladder almost 12 feet above the ground and good young edible pods almost cover a table knife." Ken Muffet, Penrith, NSW

\* \* \*

"I was just over in California for the World Horticultural Congress in Davis. There is a great deal of enthusiasm over there for seed saving and many people saving heirloom varieties...To enlarge on my aspirations with regard to heirloom lettuce varieties, I plan to start commercial production of a salad mix using various seedling crops. I am interested in only unusual lettuces and those that can be leaf picked, in particular Red Oakleaf and Red Salad Bowl."

Steven Adey, Castle Hill, NSW

\* \* \*

"I am interested in saving seed for you from the Black Prince Pumpkin. Would it be likely to cross with the "Big Max"? How far should it be planted from other varieties? I'm not up on bees' patterns."

Ted Pyke, Chinchilla, Qld.

\*Yes it will cross with the Big Max, being in the same species, *Cucurbita maxima*. Pumpkins with cylindrical, wide, corky stems are in this species.



"I heard about your seed exchange network on ABC radio here in the Northern Territory and was immediately interested to learn that there is an effort to coordinate contact between people who wish to preserve fruit and vegetable types from a time when long shelf life was not the only consideration." Christopher leGras, Jabiru, N.T.

\* \* \*

"I am glad to see that people are reviving and preserving the great varieties of vegetables." Michael Baldacchino, Footscray, Vic.

"I propose to do lot of travelling with no exact time element involved, so that I should have the chance to look for vegetable varieties in all states. I will certainly try to discover any remnants of apple varieties such as Sterma, Stewart Seedling which I distinctly remember." Bill Martin, Ningi, Qld.

\* \* \*

"Many thanks for sending to me the Seed Savers' Network newsletter which I have read with enormous interest. Congratulations to everybody concerned for putting together such a worthwhile program.

Thank you also for sending the seeds. They have been given to the head gardener here at The Lodge and will be used in the vegetable garden..."

Hazel Hawke, Canberra, ACT

\* \* \*

"Let us know if there is anything on our seed list you want. Good gardening." Myrtle and Ron Charteris, Brisbane Organic Growers Group.

\* \* \*

"I am a small Brazilian farmer very interested in agro-ecology and forestry. Right now I am trying to organize, by my own, a SEED NETWORK OF BRAZILIAN NATIVE FRUITS, especially endangered tropical fruits and those ones used for timber and firewood. I would like to exchange experience with your group, to know how does your seed network function. I'll be very thankful if your organization could send us a catalog, manual or book about preservation of genetic resources and use of appropriate technology in preparation of nurseries and seedlings..." S.O.S. FLORESTAS, Nicolas Behr, CX. Postal 04-0262, 70312 BRASILIA DF, BRAZIL.

\*If anyone could help out with request, please write direct.

\* \* \*

"I heard that Community Aid Abroad is trying to get some seed banks going in problem-stricken African countries- eg. Mozambique... On Thurs. Aug. 28th I heard an item on Country Hour- A.B.C. Radio that the Fed. Govt. is going to send seed collecting teams around certain areas and capital cities - their aim: -re-afforestation and to send material to third world countries." Betty Singh, Dollar, Vic.

\*Does anyone have any further information on this scheme?

\* \* \*

"My husband and I were recently discussing the fact that Ironbark Pumpkin had not been around for years- we wondered why when it had everything going for it. I remember, as a child (a few years back now) trying to peel it when preparing vegies for a meal- it sure lived up to its name."

Mrs. K Giles-Clark, Ulverstone, Tas.

\*The search for the old Ironbark still continues. We have had only one lead: somewhere in W.A.

\* \* \*

"I'm sending you some Bismark potato tubers (purple variety). We have grown them every year since and find them delicious. When boiled the purple colour all but disappears from the skin. They are a distinct kidney shape and vary enormously in size- no doubt one of the reasons they are ignored by the commercial growers."

Jill Lenghaus, Hamilton, Vic.

\* Well we have not tasted them yet. We have just planted those that we propagated from what you sent us, Jill, as well as those mentioned in last year's newsletter. There will be some blue, and red skinned ones as well as a yellow-fleshed one.

\* \* \*



"I am very pleased with your idea, because I am always looking for different and unusual food. The roots of my interest in different vegetables, etc. originates in my profession. I am a Diplome Home economist, worked as a Catering Supervisor, Cooking Teacher and in the last 17 years as a chef here and overseas, whatever I've seen, tasted or cooked somewhere, I like to grow now and sometimes it is hard to get the seeds."

Linde Schifferdecker, Figtree, N.S.W."

\* \* \*

"We find ourselves very much in unison with your causes to preserve diversity of seed, and to stop it being concentrated in just a few hands...We have harvested, stored, and labelled well over 100 varieties in all."

Ron and Kath Lea, Stansbury, S.A.

\* \* \*

"This year I am saving some of my savoys purely for the purpose of seed. My isolation may be imperfect (200 ft. to wild brassicas on my neighbour's property.)"

Jonathan Sturm, Franklin, Tas.

\* 200 ft. should prevent most crossing, but much greater distance is needed to assure absolute purity. Plants of broccoli, cauliflower, brussels sprouts, kale, and kohlrabi are all of the species *B.oleracea*, which also includes cabbage. Different varieties of any of these named vegetables should be isolated to prevent intercrossing. However, if two of these varieties are known from experience to flower at different times, they should be planted side by side with no mixing.

\* \* \*

"Recently we decided to start our own bio-regional seed service and will be buying/selling/swapping with others at Permaculture meetings in Nambour and Gympie and at local markets."

Alf Finch, M.S.316 Gympie Qld.

\* \* \*

"I work as a commercial vegetable plant breeder. Some varieties I am offering come from my own garden. I have collected from commercial growers who no longer want to go on with their old varieties."

Jeff Billing, Alphington, Vic.

\* Jeff's list will be printed in the Spring Newsletter, along with all everyone else's.

\* \* \*

"I should have some fairly fixed varieties of maize and cucurbits as a result of my breeding work, within another year or two. The maize lines referred to have opaque, relatively soft (easy to grind) grain whose protein quality is quite superior to that in ordinary field maize."

J.A. Lane, Kempsey, NSW

\* \* \*

"Last year a chap from near Newcastle advertised for two kinds of beans. I helped out with one kind and someone else the other."

Dudley Rush, Manilla, NSW

\* Hope you made a swift recovery, heart-wise, Dudley.

\* \* \*

"What we need is a register of all the varieties currently available commercially in this country so we know what is widely available and what is stocked by only a few outlets. This kind of register should be kept on a micro-computer for ease of updating and printouts. It could be compiled from 'seed sellers' catalogues...

We need to identify heirloom varieties that have been in Australia for a long time and then trace those still available. (I am currently compiling a list of the varieties of potatoes grown in NSW over the past 100 or so years I can list over 70 varieties at the moment by name but I have not yet located good descriptions to identify each kind)...

There is an excellent book by Carolyn Jabs called "The Heirloom Gardener", San Francisco, Sierra Club Books 1984.



Maybe what we need to look at is a manual for seed savers that would tell people everything they need to know about each of the types of seed they want to keep, then the newsletter could limit itself to new information and lists of seeds for swapping.

Royce Wiles, Bowning, NSW

\* Yes we have thought of getting such a register together, maybe through a grant; your second point about heirlooms, we are making progress with, although it could be speeded up with a larger publicity campaign (see CONTACTS WITH OTHER GROUPS); yes we have the Carolyn Jabs book and agree with your estimation; on your last point, because many new members requested seed-saving information, we have included some in this Bulletin.

The Seed Savers' Network manual should be ready by the Spring Newsletter.

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#### LIONEL FIFIELD'S LETTER



Have you noticed how some people start a project and it keeps going? It gradually grows despite setbacks, criticism, and all sorts of impediments. Other people start their projects and despite all odds being in favour of success, it just runs out of juice.

I believe that success and failure depends so much on how deeply we feel motivated and interested in what we are doing as opposed to what we ought to do, what would be good for others, or what would provide us with a satisfactory way of earning money. Either one's spirit is with the project or absent from it.

I sense that now, more than ever before, we are needing to move into and give support to whatever feels good to each of us. There are individuals whose purpose it is to get projects under way and these people create centres of attraction for other individuals to offer their gifts and talents. Such leadership is often found in reluctant hands because it wasn't sought after. These founders of the project have within them the vision, even if not consciously aware of it, and thus know who or what fits in with it.

Some of you reading this article are perhaps surprised at what is building around you. I am a great believer in re-learning the art of listening carefully to yourself. Be careful not to get trapped into believing that your organisation should be growing faster than it is. Take care to listen to others but not give over your vision. Step by step you will create an organisation (tiny or huge) that is well-founded and truly beneficial to the greater society.

Take heart! Keep going! Give your talents freely and share your gifts fully. Watch them grow! I believe that is true wealth and real prosperity.

Finally, many a person who is remembered with affection and gratitude for what he/she contributed to our wellbeing was spurned and laughed at and discouraged for much of their lives. So hold your vision - bring it into being step by step and be ever grateful for whatever support you receive.

This will always be just enough!

Lionel is coordinating the campaign, "200 million trees". For information, contact him at The Relaxation Centre, cnr Brookes and Wickham Streets, Fortitude Valley, 4006.



## CONTACT WITH OTHER GROUPS

Many of our members are already part of some other group e.g. Henry Doubleday Research Association, organic growing groups, Country Women's Association, gardening clubs. We have to rely heavily on the established media while that initial contact work is done and we would like to follow every lead we have to discover as many varieties of old vegetables as we can. But it costs money and time to contact organisations. We have written to NSW Gardening clubs, had ABC radio coverage and had articles printed in magazines. If you are a member of a club with gardening members, we would like you to speak on our behalf at meetings or even reprint some of our writings in your club's publication. We have already swapped memberships and newsletters with organic growers in N.S.W. and Queensland, Willing Workers on Organic Farms, the Food Justice Centre in Brisbane and the Tasman Permaculture Seed Exchange.

## SEED TRANSACTIONS

Every person that received one of the 360 newsletters we printed had a list of the seed available. Some people asked to grow a whole lot of one vegetable (many varieties of one species) because they are collectors or teachers and wanted to see and grow diversity. Others tried to work out what varieties would do well in their area and just select what was suitable.

We proposed that a listed member offer a 36 cent stamp per sample to another listed member; but if the person had not yet offered anything, we asked them to send three stamps per sample. It was excessive for some of us but it was to avoid the listing being used as a cheap seed catalogue, because we are not a seed company.

We hope that seeds sent are used mainly for breeding stock (something with which to start). We send few seeds, (average 30) depending on how many seeds we have in stock and how widely we want to spread them. Some seeds are in short supply when we first touch them. That is to say we are usually sent small samples and we redistribute them.

What we really hope is that everyone who has been sent seed will offer them in the Spring Newsletter. The deadline for that is July 15th.

## SEED RETURN

Many seeds that we sent away were in short supply so we could only send small quantities. For all the bush squash (*Cucurbita pepo*) that we offered last year, we sent only 7 seeds to each of four people for each variety.

We also multiplied some of them: Golden Eagle, Giant (small!) Golden Summer, Tender and True, but we missed the hand-pollination of the Connecticut Field because we were away at Christmas...so we did not keep the seeds as we were not certain of their pedigree.

We know it is nicer to be in the garden than filling out forms, but please make the effort to offer seeds in the Spring Newsletter. Whether you have been saving the seed for many years, or you just started with some that we sent to you, or someone has given you excess of home saved seeds, your entry in the Network's listing is essential to make the project viable.

Please fill in, and send back the form on the back (or make your own version) before July 15th for printing in the Spring Newsletter. Try to include such details as country of origin, or where in Australia it has previously grown; if it is an heirloom, how long it has been in your family or in your friend's family; any strength or weaknesses; botanical name, if uncommon. If it comes from a seed company, note it. We will also accept herb listings.

## MEMBERSHIP

Thankyou to all of you who sent donations. This has allowed us to keep the membership at \$5.00. Welcome to our numerous new members.

Life membership is \$300.00. Your long-sighted offer will help see this preservation programme through hard beginnings. All donations are cumulative and life memberships proudly acknowledged.

Time freely given has kept costs down again: Many thanks to Alison Wiseman for the cartoons, and Derek for the printing.



I am offering these seeds for the Spring Newsletter  
Cutting or seed offered: \_\_\_\_\_  
Common plant name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Herb or vegetable? \_\_\_\_\_  
Who grew it before you? \_\_\_\_\_  
From where did that person obtain it? \_\_\_\_\_

Month and year collected: \_\_\_\_\_  
Description of plant: \_\_\_\_\_

Comments on growing conditions,  
harvesting, storing, usage: \_\_\_\_\_

Collector's Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
and address: \_\_\_\_\_

send to: Seed Savers' Network  
Box 24 Nimbin 2480

"Gardeners preserving our vegetable heritage"  
NB. There is no need to send seed with this.

Please, renew my membership for 1987  
I enclose \$5.00  
Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Please ignore this if you have paid in '87

Seed Savers' Network  
Box 24 Nimbin 2480  
"Gardeners preserving  
our vegetable heritage"

