

The New Heirloom Garden Book

by Ellen Ecker Ogden
Available in bookstores February 2021



WHY AN HEIRLOOM GARDEN?

The words *heirloom garden* might bring to mind the era when a young bride and groom would plant their first garden with seeds and fruit grafts given to them as wedding gifts by relatives. Proud to carry on the legacy of their ancestors, the couple would nurture and tend a young Cox's Orange Pippin apple tree and greengage plum tree as a pledge to their future. Together, they would harvest fat Scarlet Keeper carrots, layering them in the root cellar along with Blue Hubbard squash and Gilfeather turnip, leaving a few plants in the ground to allow them to go to seed. Gardening from seed to seed was a promise that there would be both food for the winter and seeds for another growing season the following year.

An heirloom, as defined by the dictionary, can be either a valuable object that has belonged to a family for several generations or a plant or breed of animal that is not associated with large-scale commercial agriculture. The term originated in England, combining the two words *heir* ("inheritance") and *loom* ("tool") as a way of passing along property without a written document or legal settlement. Heirloom gardens were simply the way people gardened; they were a place to grow food when life itself was totally dependent on the plant world in a way that our modern culture no longer recognizes.

Seed saving was a necessity but also a link to the past. Some of the heirloom seeds that we grow today were brought to the United States by immigrants who smuggled seeds inside the linings of coats, suitcases, and hatbands, or sewn into the hems of dresses. Handed down from family to family, seeds were something small they could bring to connect them to their homeland. All heirloom seeds are open-pollinated, which means that if you save the seeds, the resulting plant from that seed will be similar to the original parent plants. It's the way of continuing the cycle of life and a guarantee that there will be another garden the following season.

In this design chapter, I've taken classic design elements and merged history and nostalgia to create a New Heirloom Garden. You'll find twelve designs for heirloom kitchen gardens inspired in part by nostalgia, based on real places and people. Heirloom seed experts help to fill in the gaps, sharing the reasons they grow heirlooms and favorites.

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INTRODUCTION

THE ART OF GROWING FOOD

"Here, try one of these," I'll say when you visit my heirloom garden, offering you a handful of sugar snap peas, a sprig of chervil to tingle your taste buds, or a sweet *Fraises des Bois* strawberry. "Look at this!" I'll say, as I carefully peel away the deep mahogany leaves of a fall Treviso radicchio and pluck off a bitter leaf, or "Smell this," as I point out a vanilla-scented white nicotiana.

I may be able to entice you to try something new from my kitchen garden, but digging deeper in search of the old-fashioned varieties, those delicate fruits, fragrant flowers, and open-pollinated heirloom vegetables, is the secret to unearthing your own favorites and establishing a lifelong desire to grow a food garden. And it all starts with a seed. Watching green shoots emerge from the ground—active, robust, and alive—is proof that seeds are pre-equipped with everything they need to send forth a root, a shoot, and a leaf. All I need to do is insert them into the soil, step back, and watch.

Why we garden is as individual as the plants themselves—for food, for beauty, to escape, or simply for exercise. Yet we all start with the same three things—seeds, plants, and soil—and each of our gardens will be completely unique. I planted my first garden fresh out of art school and just after starting a graphic design business. It was a way to blend the colors and textures of plants with my love of cooking and eating.

It would be stretching the truth to say my first garden thrived. There was a constant battle with the weeds, and the garden hose didn't quite reach,

so the plants were frequently thirsty. Yet the thrill of dashing to the garden just before dinner to clip a basket of baby artichokes and a fistful of cosmos kept me at it. I reveled in fewer trips to the grocery store in favor of planting everything I might eat throughout the year. It gave me immense satisfaction to know I was part of the natural cycle of the seasons that made up a year in the garden, and it still does.

Back then, I didn't know that starting with a design could make a difference in the way I felt about my garden. At the time, it actually felt like a lot of work to get out into the garden and not much fun. Working along with my husband, the goal was to grow as much as we could to feed our family of four, which meant that I'd spend the entire month of August standing at the stove, canning and freezing beans, spinach, and broccoli. At the sign of the first frost, we'd harvest potatoes and place them in the root cellar along with cabbage, kohlrabi, leeks, beets, and carrots packed in sand. It was more a way of life that allowed us to live off the land, as stewards and recipients of healthy organic food.

In 2003, my relationship to the garden changed when I moved from the ten-acre farm to a smaller plot in a village setting. With neighbors on either side and less than a quarter acre, it was a challenge to transfer my garden skills from a large Victory garden style to something more compact. It required me to think small, which is how I discovered the art of growing food. Instead



of growing everything I would need for a full year, I reduced my plant wish list to only those foods that I could not buy at the local farmers' market or through a CSA (community-supported agriculture). The plants and flowers I chose to grow reflected my vintage 1905 house, which involved growing and rediscovering heirlooms.

I started with a five-year plan, mapping out my future garden areas by first taking note of what was already growing. There was an antique apple tree in the backyard and two overgrown heirloom lilacs on either side of the porch. Knowing nothing about garden design, I took day trips to visit gardens through the Garden Conservancy's Open Days tours, returning home with lists of plants and design sketches in an attempt to organize my landscape. What surprised me most about these forays to visit beautiful gardens was that many of the most elegant gardeners grew only ornamentals. Edible gardens either did not exist or were kept far out of sight, behind a barn or garage, often sadly neglected.

I garden because I love to eat. It's that simple, and it became my goal to teach myself how to design kitchen gardens, at least partly in order to make it more inviting to be in the garden and turn "work" into "play." The way to do this was to create simple designs that transformed growing food into something fun and engaging, rather than feeling like effort. In 2011, my book *The Complete Kitchen Garden* was published, with twelve kitchen garden designs that were both beautiful and productive, along with recipes to inspire the cook to plant a seed, watch it grow, and then sit down at the table to the full satisfaction of eating from his or her own garden.

Good gardeners make growing a garden look easy, but gardening takes time, experience, and an eye for plant material and placement, which is why starting with the basics and a solid plan makes sense. We all want that weed-free, everblooming, overflowing harvest-basket type of garden, yet, in fact, gardening starts by getting dirty and devoting time to tasks that are not always rewarding. When growing a food garden, try to

think about how it is more than a place to grow food. It can heighten your awareness on every level and become a place that taps into all of the senses; we inhale more deeply, look more closely, taste with appreciation, listen with curiosity, and touch everything.

With this new book, I offer more of my kitchen garden designs and recipes, with a focus on heirloom varieties in order to bring back the best-tasting vegetables, the most-fragrant flowers, and the forgotten fruits that grow in your backyard. Perhaps you'll be inspired to dig more deeply into why heirlooms are important for protecting biodiversity, to listen to the stories, to learn more about the politics of seeds, to meet experts in the field, and to think more about how you can become a seed saver. Seeds may look small, but they hold a lot of power and lore.

You may have a one-square-foot plot rubbing shoulders with a kitchen door or a wilderness waiting to be tamed, but planting a garden of any size is an opportunity to dig deeper into the past, to rediscover older varieties that have largely been dropped from the seed catalogs, to change the way we have been gardening for the past century, and to turn back the clock to pay attention to why seeds matter in the long run.

In a world where most supermarket options have largely dulled our palates and choices are homogenized, food gardens are more important than ever. Tasting food pulled from the ground and twisting off a green stem, or picking up an apple dropped from a tree at the peak of ripeness, is the way I wish we all ate. A true garden settles into a space where the garden and home merge, becoming an extension of you, opening the senses in new and inspiring ways, and ultimately creating a sanctuary for living. An heirloom garden is an opportunity to plant a piece of history that provides a deeper connection to the food you eat, the people you love, and the landscape that surrounds your home.

— Ellen Ecker Ogden

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DIRECT SOWING IN THE GARDEN

Prepare your garden soil by gently turning over the soil with a garden fork, adding compost, and removing all the stones and weeds. Rake it smooth and mark the planting rows by stretching twine between two sticks to form a straight line, and then make a furrow with a dibber or stick. Sprinkle the seeds into the row, cover with soil, and press gently. Lightly water the soil with the spray nozzle on a hose or with a watering can, and wait. Similarly to starting seeds indoors, it will typically take between three and ten days for green sprouts to appear. If necessary, thin the rows to allow each plant enough room to grow to full size. Be sure to give each plant plenty of room; as with people, overcrowding can lead to stress and disease.

TRANSPLANTING INTO THE GARDEN

Even though most plants love the sun, it is best to wait until an overcast or slightly rainy day to transplant. Avoid the hot midday sun, which will stress the plants' systems and make their leaves and stems wither; if this is the only option, use a shade cloth to protect the seedlings until they are well established. Mark the garden with a dibber or the back of a hoe, allowing space between rows; then dig a shallow hole with a trowel and gently place the plant in the hole. Add water mixed with a water-soluble high-phosphorus fertilizer such as Neptune's Harvest, which is a fish emulsion that gives the roots a boost. Finally, backfill the hole with soil, tamp lightly, and water again.

STAYING WEED-FREE

Your garden will involve many steps along the way, yet cultivating the soil throughout the summer to keep it weed-free is one of the most important tasks. Pulling weeds by hand, making sure the roots come up with the leaves, is the most effective option. Gently run a hoe along the rows between the plants to dislodge weed seedlings, and the daily or weekly regimen of pulling weeds should minimize the weeds that naturally populate in any open soil. Layering plants to take up as much space as possible and staging them based on height, as well as sowing cover crops during times that the garden is not planted, are effective in covering any open areas that will be susceptible to weed seeds.

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SEED SAVING

Inside the hard coat of a seed is a fragile embryo that will become the next generation of a cherished variety. Some seeds can last for years, while others have shorter life spans. Some seeds are easy to grow and save, while others require more skill. While you may be able to save seeds on a small scale, there are some crops that require a bit more know-how. Consult the true seed experts who have written detailed books about all aspects of seed-saving techniques and can provide more in-depth resources.

How you store your seeds, whether homegrown, handed down, or bought, impacts the viability and longevity of the seed, no matter the variety. Most seed catalogs send their seeds in a paper envelope, which allows the seed to breathe and is lightweight for shipping, but it is not ideal for long-term storage. When your seeds arrive, put them in a cool, dry location, away from the sun, so moisture and humidity will not hinder germination.

SHORT-TERM STORAGE

If you are storing seeds for the following year's garden, it is safe to save them in paper envelopes, cloth bags, or tin boxes. These natural materials allow air to flow; adjusting for any respiration that may occur during storage. Be sure everything is properly marked with a label, both inside and outside the container, including date, varietal name, and where it was grown. Store seed envelopes upright in a seed box, grouped by the type: vegetable, flower, and herb. For extra protection against mice, use a glass jar with a lid. (One gardener I know found a cache of seeds in a mouse nest; each type of seed was divided into piles by type. Takes an organized mouse!)

LONG-TERM STORAGE

If you plan to keep your seeds for a long time, consider storing them in a glass jar with a tight-fitting lid and placing it in the freezer. Again, be sure everything is properly marked with labels, both inside and outside the container, including date, varietal name, and where it was grown. When seeds are stored in a sealed container, the moisture content will remain relatively stable regardless of the surrounding environment. Once the lid is opened, the seeds will draw in moisture from the air, and their viability will begin to degrade. Make it quick, and remove the seeds that you plan to use for that season, seal the jar, and return it to the freezer.

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HUSK GROUND-CHERRY CLAFOUTI

SERVES 8

The first time you taste a husk ground-cherry, your taste buds will buzz with pineapple, butterscotch, and mango flavors. These sweet cousins of tomatoes can be eaten fresh off the vine or baked into a rich, custardy clafouti.

2 tablespoons (¼ stick)
unsalted butter, at room
temperature, for greasing

2 cups ripe husk
ground-cherries, preferably
Aunt Molly's, or pitted
cherries or berries of choice

¾ cup unbleached
all-purpose flour

6 tablespoons
granulated sugar

½ teaspoon sea salt

1¼ cups whole milk

2 tablespoons kirsch

1 tablespoon vanilla extract

6 eggs

2 tablespoons
confectioners' sugar,
for dusting

Position a rack in the center of the oven. Preheat the oven to 425°F.

Butter an 8½ × 12-inch baking dish or a medium cast-iron skillet. Remove the paper husks from the ground-cherries.

In a blender, combine the flour, granulated sugar, and salt. Slowly pour in the milk, kirsch, vanilla, and finally the eggs, one at a time, blending until smooth, 2 or 3 minutes.

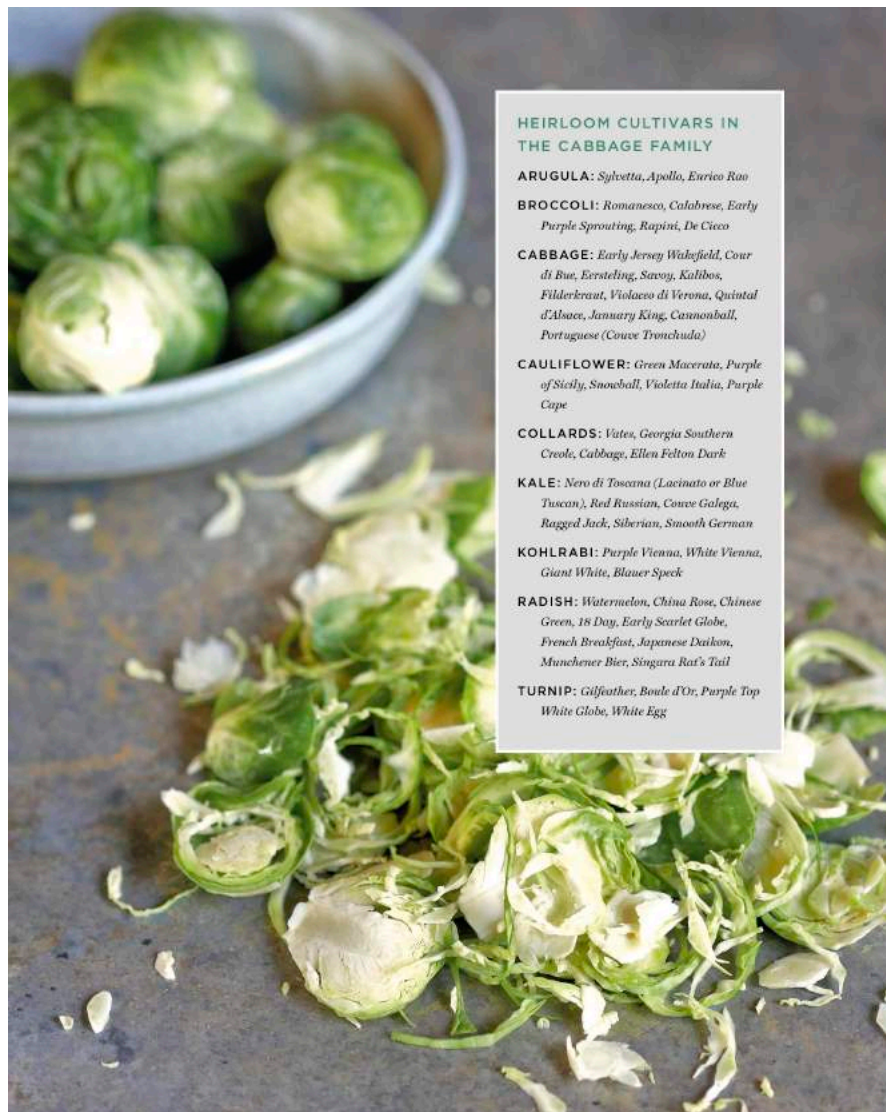
Pour the batter into the prepared dish and evenly distribute the ground-cherries over the top. Bake for 30 minutes or until a skewer inserted into the center comes out clean and a golden crust has formed. Cool slightly. Serve the clafouti directly out of the baking dish, or run a butter knife around the edges and carefully flip it onto a serving platter or cutting board. Dust with confectioners' sugar right before serving.

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HEIRLOOM CULTIVARS IN THE CABBAGE FAMILY

ARUGULA: *Sylvestra, Apollo, Enrico Rao*

BROCCOLI: *Romanesco, Calabrese, Early Purple Sprouting, Rapini, De Cicco*

CABBAGE: *Early Jersey Wakefield, Cour de Bue, Ecraseling, Savoy, Kalibos, Filderkrant, Violaceo di Verona, Quintal d'Alsace, January King, Cannonball, Portuguese (Couve Tronchuda)*

CAULIFLOWER: *Green Macerata, Purple of Sicily, Snowball, Violetta Italia, Purple Cape*

COLLARDS: *Vates, Georgia Southern Creole, Cabbage, Ellen Felton Dark*

KALE: *Nero di Toscana (Lacinato or Blue Tuscan), Red Russian, Couve Galega, Ragged Jack, Siberian, Smooth German*

KOHLRABI: *Purple Vienna, White Vienna, Giant White, Blauer Speck*

RADISH: *Watermelon, China Rose, Chinese Green, 18 Day, Early Scarlet Globe, French Breakfast, Japanese Daikon, Munchener Bier, Singara Rat's Tail*

TURNIP: *Gilfeather, Boule d'Or, Purple Top White Globe, White Egg*

BRUSSELS SPROUT SLAW

with Cashew-Curry Dressing SERVES 4

A favorite way to serve Brussels sprouts is steamed and topped with a knob of sweet butter and a crack of black pepper, yet this raw winter salad with a delicious vegan dressing has become a new rival.

4 cups Brussels sprouts (about 2 pounds), preferably Long Island Improved

2 large curly kale leaves, preferably Lacinato, finely chopped (about 2 cups)

½ small red onion, preferably Southport Red Globe, finely chopped

½ cup grated Parmigiano-Reggiano

½ cup chopped walnuts, lightly toasted in a dry skillet

½ cup dried currants

Cashew-Curry Dressing (recipe follows)

Trim the stems and outside leaves of the Brussels sprouts and coarsely chop them into ¼-inch pieces or, if you are comfortable with a mandoline, slice them into thin slivers. Transfer them to a salad bowl and add the kale, onion, cheese, walnuts, and currants.

Spoon all of the dressing over the vegetables and toss to coat. Refrigerate to keep cool until ready to serve.

CASHEW-CURRY DRESSING

Makes ½ cup

½ cup cashews
½ cup boiling water
¼ cup apple cider vinegar
1½ tablespoons lemon juice
1 tablespoon curry powder
2 teaspoons maple syrup
½ teaspoon sea salt, plus more as needed

In a small bowl, soak the cashews in the boiling water for 10 minutes; drain well. In a blender, combine the cashews, vinegar, lemon juice, curry powder, maple syrup, and salt, and puree on high speed until smooth, less than a minute. Transfer to a bowl until ready to use as a dressing for the salad. Refrigerate for up to a week.