

Seeds From Grandma's Garden

LOU ANN GOOD
Lancaster Farming Staff
LANDISVILLE (Lancaster Co.) — If you are searching for beans like Grandma used to grow in her garden, but can't find them, check with the Heirloom Seed Program at Landis Valley Museum. Chances are that they will have the bean seed although it may be called a different name than Grandma called it.

That's because many of the seeds handed down through the generations are referred to by family names such as Alma's Limas or Jacob's Cattle beans.

As years pass, many seeds that were commonly available in previous years disappear. In fact, Nancy Pippart, coordinator of the Heirloom Seed Project and historical gardens at Landis Valley, said, "Less than three percent of the seeds available in 1903 are available today. And of the 7,000 apple varieties available in the states in 1900, more than 5,000 are lost."

Many seeds have been lost because of hybridization and the requirements of large-scale growers.

That does not mean that the produce from the seeds did not taste as good as those that did survive or that they are less disease resistant. Through time, the seeds have been lost.

Pippart and about 20 volunteers at Landis Valley want to change that. For the past eight years, they have been planting several acres with heirloom seeds passed on through family generations. These seeds are available by ordering through the Museum's catalogue and at the Museum's annual Harvest Days, held this year on October 9 to 10.

During Harvest Days, visitors may observe the fenced-in gardens, typical of 200 years ago, and purchase heirloom seeds and a limited quantity of produce grown in the gardens.

Volunteers work year-round in the gardens. Pippart said, "They do everything — plant, weed, hoe, water, harvest, process, fill seed

packets, and ship catalogue orders.

Most of the volunteers are backyard gardeners themselves whose nostalgic for the past often invokes interest in heirloom seeds. Participants in the heirloom seed program strive to preserve the varieties that their own families use.

Pippart said the program began when Lee Stoltzfus from Lititz presented the idea to the museum board. Stoltzfus had contacts and many seeds that he had been preserving over the years. With his and donations from many other families, the museum has been able to offer numerous traditional strains of non-hybrid varieties of plants grown by Pennsylvania Germans before 1940, which have an oral or written history extending back into the early 1800s.

Ida Risser, columnist for *Lancaster Farming*, is one of the persons who has donated heirloom seeds. The Risser Early Sugar Pea and Risser Sickle Pea are family favorites which have been passed through the generations and are now available for other gardeners to purchase through the Heirloom Seed catalogue or at Harvest Days.

Prices for the seed packets range between \$1.25 to \$3. Since some seeds are in short supply, customers can purchase only one packet per each variety.

The heirloom seed project is only a small part of the Harvest Days celebration. More than 75 craft and living history demonstrations from the 1750-1900 era will show how to make items such as apple cider, gingerbread, bricks, Battenberg lace, dry a house, rye straw roof thatching, dyeing, scherenschnitte, and many early crafts.

Story telling, folk and fiddler music, angling, clock repairing and presentations about Mennonite life and religion will be held.

Horse-drawn wagon and carriage rides with the Museum's horse are available to visitors.

Landis Valley is the largest outdoor museum of Pennsylvania German rural heritage that is a vil-

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Johann McKee is one of the volunteers who will be working in costume in the farmstead garden at Landis Valley during Harvest Days on October 9 and 10. The raised bed gardens are recreations based on the 4-square design typical of the late 18th century.



Volunteers sort heirloom seeds for packaging in preparation of the upcoming Harvest Day celebration that highlights Pennsylvania Dutch history.

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