



# A GUIDE TO MAKING HERITAGE PLANT INVENTORIES



## Making Heritage Plant Inventories: A Guide

### Why are we working to save our cultural plant heritage?

Heritage plants are old varieties of culturally significant garden and native plants which have never been grown in large scale production. They have a remarkable genetic diversity that is important for future plant breeding. Plants which have been cultivated in the same place for a long time are connected to gardeners' skills, knowledge, memories and stories. In this way our heritage plants are a part of our material and intellectual cultural heritage. Saving and valuing heritage plants, the information connected to them and their stories help us to be connected to bygone days and our own roots.

In order to save your plant heritage, you have to know it. For this reason it is a good idea to collect as much information as possible about heritage plants and share it. You can start by looking around in your own garden or in the gardens of your family, friends, neighbors and acquaintances. This guide gives you some examples of interesting plant discoveries and advice on how to save information about heritage plants.

### Tips and tricks for making plant inventory expeditions

- Bring a pencil and paper with you.
- Bring paper bags or envelopes for seeds.
- Bring a camera or mobile phone with fully charged battery.
- Immediately write down what you are told - or record the discussion. (Be aware that some people do not like recordings.)
- Immediately write the name of the plant, collecting location and date on the seed bag. It is easy to forget!!
- It is also useful to have waterproof shoes, a tape measure, a spade (do not forget that you need the garden owner's permission to dig) and plastic bags.

It's a good idea to share information and plant materials that you find with other partners interested in them and with research institutes. The more people and institutions know about heritage plants and grow them, the safer our heritage is!

### Denmark: “Raisins from Lolland” (Grey pea)

Grey peas belong to a common type of drying peas, grown in the field and used for cooking in Denmark since the Bronze Age (1800 BC). Raisins from Lolland were commonly grown in the southern part of Denmark on the fertile islands of Lolland and Falster. We find them described in literature back to the 1650s - famous for their good taste. They were dried and stored as a protein-rich staple food for the winter season, before potatoes became common. Field cultivation of grey peas ceased in the beginning of the 20th century, but was continued for household use by crofters. Poul Hoff Olsen, Vester Ulslev (Lolland), was interested in the food culture of the past and got a handful for growing from a small farm on Lolland. Some years later the peas came to Tina Hansen, a biodynamic farmer. Tina gave the peas to the Danish Seed Savers, who now take care of them. Furthermore, they are stored in the Nordic Gene Resource Center. Raisins from Lolland have red-violet flowers and grow 80 to 150 cm in height. The seeds are wrinkled and brown like raisins. Nowadays they are becoming popular as a local source of legumes for high-quality protein foods such as hummus.



Photo: Svend Erik Sørensen

### Estonia: Nõmmetädi bean

Kadrina primary school’s cook Magda Nõmm (to the right on photo) used a bean that she was very fond of. She had a small field plot close to the school where among other things she grew vegetables, including beans. Anto Varda worked as a young teacher in the same school in the beginning of the 1970s. Magda Nõmm once gave these beans to Anto’s wife Tiiu with the words: “Take these, they are good”. In 2017 Anto Varda stated in a garden inventory that it is now about 50 years since he and Tiiu got this bean from aunt Magda Nõmm, and the family have grown it for their own use ever since. Nõmmetädi beans are mainly used as a green bean with a vigorous branching habit. Pods are green, the seeds are pink and white colored, looking like tasty candies. The bean has some very good characteristics - it does not develop fibers during its whole growing period and has a very good taste. It is easily prepared by gently boiling it in unsalted water and then storing in a deep freezer until used. When you take it out of the deep freezer, you should boil it a little more. After boiling you may gently fry it on a pan with butter and then it is ready to eat.



Photo: Neeruti Selts

### Latvia: Anna's Black Currant Bush

During our heirloom plant expedition in Latgale (2019), we met Anna Glužina (90 years of age), who showed us a blackcurrant bush and told us a story that goes way back. This blackcurrant has grown in Anna's home garden for more than 80 years. It is a heritage from her husband's parents, who planted the bush. For generations, picking the largest berries straight from the bush was the favorite way of enjoying the blackcurrant fruits for both grownups and kids. The berries are especially large and sweet, and the bush itself is healthy. The berries get ripe almost simultaneously and grow to a diameter of 5-7 mm. When overripe, the berries fall off. The best feature of this blackcurrant is its long lifetime. Berries can be pressed for juice using an electric juicer, and the leftover pulp can be boiled as a drink so that nothing goes to waste. Juice can also be pressed using a steam juicer. If sugar is added, it can be stored for winter (used in drinks, jellies, marmalade, cakes). Another use is in making traditional jams. Berries can also be put in the freezer and later prepared for cocktails, ice-cream or just enjoyed fresh.



Photo: Sandra Stabinge

### Lithuania: Vilnijos turnip

In 2017 seed saver Rasa was looking around in the Halės market in Vilnius old town, when she noticed something interesting. She approached the seller and asked: "How much is it for this rutabaga?". The seller answered: "It is not a rutabaga, it is a turnip!". Rasa started to speak with them and discovered that they had got this turnip variety from their neighbours who are growing it in Vilnius district. She learned also that they have kept this variety in the family since the interwar period – more than 80 years! What strikes you is the immense size of this turnip, which can weigh up to 1kg. Its shape varies from a typical flat turnip shape to more oval or slightly elongated. The skin is orange-yellowish, turning into greenish on the aboveground part. The growth period is 70-80 days and the vegetable does not turn tough ("woody") or form fibers. It has yellow pumpkin coloured flesh that is crunchy when raw and has a creamy consistency when boiled and excellent taste qualities. It keeps well until the springtime and during the winter of 2019-2020 it overwintered outdoors. The above-ground part is characteristic for turnip, as is its cultivation. Turnips prefer full sun and rich sandy loam fertilised with ash, but this particular turnip is not too demanding with regard to the soil type. Like other turnips, it prefers cooler and wetter conditions and is best sown in late June for autumn harvest.



Photo: Rasa Buslavičienė

## How to make heritage plant inventories

### Meeting the garden owner:

1. Make an appointment for visiting the garden in advance if possible - this is usually the easiest way to make contact and engage the owner. Of course it is also possible to visit a garden without an appointment.
2. Reserve enough time. It is not good to be in a hurry during the visit.
3. Introduce yourself. Explain why you have come and why information about this garden is important to you.
4. A good way to start is by talking about a plant that you have noticed in the garden.
5. Let the garden owner know that you want to learn. Be sincere and show your interest.
6. Ask permission for taking photos.
7. Avoid asking 'is this.....?', as it is too easy to answer yes or no to such questions. Ask if there are other interesting gardens nearby which you could visit. Perhaps the owner could introduce you to a neighbor.
8. Be polite when you leave.
9. Ask if you can visit the garden again if needed. You might have to visit the garden during a different season also. It is not good to keep people occupied too long at a time. They may have other jobs to do, and older gardeners especially can easily get tired during the discussion.
10. Write down the name and contact information of the gardener as well as the date of visit.

### Questions about the plant:

1. Name of plant. Also folk name if it has such.
2. From where and from whom did you get it?
3. How long has the plant been grown?
4. Plant description. How do you propagate, grow and take care of the plant?
5. How and for what do you use the plant? How has it been used by others earlier?
6. What do you like about the plant? Color, taste, smell, yield etc.
7. How are seeds collected and stored?
8. To whom have you given the plant?
9. Which stories and memories are connected with the plant?

### Write down information about the garden:

1. How old is the garden?
2. Who owned the garden before the present owner? When did the ownership change?
3. What kind of plants are growing at present in the garden: fruit trees, berries, decorative plants, vegetables, herbs?
4. What kind of plants were grown earlier in the garden?
5. From what plants were seeds gathered?
7. If seeds are not collected any more, when and why did you stop collecting seeds?
8. Ask if there are some old garden plans or photos of the garden. Ask permission to take a photo of them.





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