

GROWERTALKS

Growing With Griffin

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Sow the Seeds of Success

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Why Hybrid?

Hybrid vegetable seed offers these advantages over open-pollinated and heirloom varieties

Disease-screened seed

Better seed quality

Higher germination

Improved seedling performance

Stronger disease resistance

Higher yields

Potentially earlier harvests

Seasoned and novice gardeners alike are rediscovering the home vegetable garden, led by healthier eating habits and wanting to know more about where their food comes from. However, that home garden may not look like it did 40 years ago.

Today's vegetable gardens come in varying shapes and sizes, from backyards to balconies. You might also find a pepper, tomato or cucumber plant mixed into a landscape bed or combo planter.

Today's gardeners are just as diverse, ranging from serious to casual. One thing they all have in common, though, is the desire to be successful, to experience the literal fruits of their labor. It's our job as growers and

retailers to make that happen, so they'll come back and do it again. And maybe next time, they'll do it bigger.

Take the hybrid road

Gardening success begins with variety selection. While heirloom vegetables come with an air of nostalgia and romance—and flavors that remind us of grandma's garden—for many busy gardeners, a modern hybrid is a better choice. Using hybrids helps growers, too!

To illustrate what we mean, let's focus on tomatoes and peppers. In recent years, we've become more aware of pathogens that can be carried on tomato and pepper seeds. In the right conditions, these pathogens can become active, infecting a crop in the greenhouse, fresh market and/or home garden.

Professional hybrid breeders like Sakata, PanAmerican Seed, Seminis, Takii and Syngenta take seed health very seriously. They have to—in addition to home-garden varieties, they breed for fresh-market farmers and commercial produce farmers, where losses would be costly.

To ensure a clean start for growers, these vegetable breeder/producers (and others like them) screen their seed lots for the presence of many potentially devastating pathogens. Starting with clean, healthy seed is so important. Sure, the seed is more expensive, but the added security is worth it. Ask anyone who's lost a house of peppers or tomatoes how that cost compared to the cost of hybrid seed.

Flavor, of course, is a key selection criterion for hybrid vegetables for the home garden and fresh market segments; it's the reason we toil in the garden for eight to 10 weeks is for the pleasure of tasting that crisp, thick-walled sweet

pepper and that sun-warmed, vine-fresh juicy tomato that we grew ourselves. It's what keeps gardeners coming back year after year!



Top picks to try

Some of our favorite hybrids for the home garden are All-America Selections (AAS) winners. AAS judges across North America evaluate vegetable entries in their own trial gardens, comparing the candidates against garden favorites with similar characteristics. AAS has Regional Winners that performed well in one or more specific regions and National Winners, which performed well everywhere.

A few of our best-selling AAS National Winners in peppers are Flaming Flare, Super Chili, Cajun Belle, Hot Sunset, Giant Marconi and Sweet Sunset. In tomatoes, try garden favorites like Big Beef and Celebrity, and newcomer Candyland, a currant tomato with a tidier habit that's easy to grow and earlier to harvest.

Pictured: 1. Super Chili Pepper. Photo: Seminis 2. Heirloom Marriage Cherokee Carbon Tomato. Photo:

PanAmerican Seed 3. Flaming Flare Pepper. Photo: Seminis 4. Candyland Tomato. Photo: PanAmerican Seed

Heirloom Marriage tomatoes offer a twist on heirloom varieties. Hybrid crosses between two heirloom varieties result in hybrids with flavor characteristics from each heirloom parent and the hybrid benefits of higher yields and disease resistance. Cherokee Carbon, for instance, is the result of a cross between Cherokee Purple and Carbon.

If small-space or container gardening is important for your clientele, check out peppers Apache, Redskin and Snackabelle, and tomatoes Husky Red, Better Bush, Homeslice and Cherry Fountain.

The Little series of determinate tomatoes was bred especially for container gardens: Little Sicily is a small slicing tomato; Little Napoli is a Roma-type with impressive yields for its size; and Little Bing is an early-fruiting, high-yielding cherry. **GT**

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