

## The preservation of crop diversity concerns us all

Garden and planting planning for the new year is on the agenda. How about growing old varieties of vegetables?

Old varieties have a variety of characteristics that are significant for growing in the allotment garden and providing delicious and healthy food. When we grow our own vegetables, it is above all about pleasing the palate and a colourful variety. Modern varieties often cannot compete with this. Unlike in commercial horticulture and global trade, simultaneous ripening or the transportability of the fruit hardly plays a role.



Not so obvious, but just as important, are old varieties as a genetic resource. Their genetically determined characteristics, such as different stress tolerances, could play an increased role in the future. Who knows what will be important then and what gene pool one will want or need to draw on in breeding.

In the 1960s, the so-called "green revolution" was advanced as a promising technology-based approach to nutrition and production. Varieties were selected for productivity and trade facilitating measures, and synthetic chemical pesticides and fertilisers increasingly entered the market.

Since then, in Germany alone, 75% of the almost 7,000 vegetable varieties and species that were still in use until 1956 are considered lost. Far more than 1,000 of the old vegetable varieties are on the Red List of endangered crops.

The established system is often at the expense of biodiversity, the environment and climate, animal welfare and ultimately human health. It is questionable whether it can really guarantee the hoped-for food security in the long term.



Against this background, old varieties with their special characteristics are increasingly coming into focus. The fact that we still have old cultivated species and varieties is mainly thanks to a large number of seed initiatives, mostly organised on a voluntary basis. They ensure the preservation of crop diversity, its dissemination and accessibility to the general public. Committed allotment garden organisations already contribute to this by cultivating the varieties and providing expert advice. This is also important politically, because legal

requirements are constantly being adapted. Currently, even the EU Seed Marketing Act is being renegotiated.

### **Do you also want to strengthen crop diversity?**

Try out old vegetable varieties in your allotment garden during the upcoming gardening season, tell people about them and give away your favourite seeds! If you want to go deeper, you can get involved in "conservation rings". You then cultivate for a year according to the conservation criteria, e.g. the bean variety 'Goldnektar' and help to preserve it.

New taste sensations, a variety of nutrients and unusual colours and shapes will brighten up your season! And the good thing is that if you like the variety, you can propagate it yourself, because such old varieties, unlike the new hybrid varieties, are seed-stable, so they retain their characteristics in the following generation.

**Eva Foos, BDG**

#### **Initiatives, seminars and sources of seed and planting material (selection):**

Dachverband Kulturpflanzen- und Nutztiervielfalt e. V.: <https://kulturpflanzen-nutztiervielfalt.org/>

Verein zur Erhaltung und Rekultivierung von Nutzpflanzen, VERN e. V.: <https://vern.de/>

Verein zur Erhaltung der Nutzpflanzenvielfalt, VEN e. V. : <https://www.nutzpflanzenvielfalt.de/>

#### ***Images:***

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