A publication of the Ujamaa Cooperative Farming Alliance

SEED CULTURE We are living the dream...collectively! CULTURE Quarterly

Volume 2, Issue 1 Spring 2025

The Mid-West Farmers of Color Collective

Finding An Ancestral Connection

Seed Saving Innovation

The African Heritage of Blackeyed Peas

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Blessings Upon Blessings

By Bonnetta Adeeb

"When you're doing God's work, it's all there for you."

Dear Friends and Growers,



Thinking about our labors over the past year, we at the Ujamaa Cooperative Farming Alliance (UCFA) have received blessings upon blessings. We have benefited from the skills and talent of our collective from all over the country and throughout the diaspora. We have been granted grace, love, and favor from our underground network, which functions like mycelium or a redwood forest that supports and connects us even when we don't see. We realize these fruits through the bounty created out of communal efforts, donations, seeds, kindness, joy, and some yummy meals.

We've learned that we possess the capacity to heal, motivate, extend, discover, and examine the healing components that are in our traditional foods and foodways. We function as a family and share the abundance of our abilities, expertise, teachings, and crops with communities, educators, municipalities, and need based service providers. We have been successful in increasing the number of BIPOC growers of heirloom seeds with 40 new growers. Our dedicated friends, partnerships, and sponsorships, and not to mention the earnest actions of a myriad of volunteers, are helping us with every task imaginable.

At the beginning of 2024, we released our first Seed Culture quarterly journal with the 2024 seed catalog and received acclaim and praise for our work. The printed publication turned out beautifully and the journal documented our publishing fortitude. The 2024 season was bookended with our first children's book *Big Daddy Greasy Green Collards* and our second, *Ella and Earl in the Collard Patch* along with children's activity and coloring books. The sale and distribution of culturally meaningful heirloom seeds and publications contributes to seed biodiversity and seed education necessary to sustain heirloom seeds for the future.

During 2024, we provided technical assistance to seed hubs, schools, and communities. Our fourth annual workshops and Convening at the Accokeek Foundations along the Potomac River in Maryland allowed members and friends to plan for the future. The Ira Wallace Seed School successfully launched and graduated the first cohort of the 2025 class "Introduction to Ethical Seed Farming" that ran from March to November 2024.

2024 was a banner year and we celebrated our growth and successes. Good thing we ended on a high note because it appears that 2025 might be one of the greatest challenges we will face. But my granny used to say, "Just because others are having it hard doesn't mean you will. Afterall, you are a blessed child." I think all those blessings will go forth to give us the strength we need to conquer anything we come up against. As a matter of fact, I am fired up and ready to go. What about y'all?

Bonnetta Adeeb, Owner, Worker, Founding Granny, Ujamaa Cooperative Farming Alliance

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SEED CULTURE is a magazine dedicated to highlighting Ujamaa Cooperative Farming Alliance events and culturally relevant seeds. UCFA covers all things seeds and agriculture related information through articles. The content produced by contributors are not necessarily the views of UCFA. We welcome letters and news items from readers. All request for permission to reprint articles must be directed to ujamaa@gmail.com.

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SEED COMMERCE & COMPETITION

Written by Kathy Anderson



Photo Credit: Kathy Anderson

The D. Landreth Seed Company, started in 1784 by David Landreth in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, is the oldest seed company in the U.S. In 1794 New York, a Shaker religious group created the first seed catalog for mail order seeds. Early commercial seed trade catalogs were archived and can be found on the web pages of the National Agricultural Library and Smithsonian Institution Libraries.

In 1819, Secretary of the Treasury, William H. Crawford, asked United States ambassadors and military officers to get seeds as they traveled around the world and bring them back to the U.S. President Adams directed rare plants and seeds to be sent to the State Department in 1825 for propagation and distribution. The U.S. Patent and Trademark Office began coordinating the collection of seeds worldwide to distribute to farmers for testing and breeding in the U.S. in 1839. When the United States Department of Agriculture was created out of the Agricultural Section of the Patent Office in 1862, the agency's early seed work involved introducing and breeding new plants. Seed producers claimed the government seed distribution was a barrier to potential profits and formed the American Seed Trade Association (ASTA) in 1883 to push for the end of government seed distribution.

The first U.S. law on seeds was the Federal Seed Act, which was approved August 9, 1939 (7 U.S.C. 1551 -1611). Under the authority of the Act (7 U.S.C. 1592), interstate and foreign commerce of seeds, labeling, prevention of misrepresentation of seeds, imported seeds standards, and other regulations are required of seed work. Also, agri-cultural, vegetable, weed, and noxious weed seeds were defined. It is important that persons dealing with seeds under the provisions of the Act understand they should make a reasonable effort to be informed of the Act and work to avoid violation of the Act and associated regulations in consideration that there are penalties associated with violations.

In 1970, the Plant Variety Protection Act (PVPA) was authorized to allow plant breeders to hold 25 years of exclusive intellectual property rights for newly developed plant varieties. In the mid-1990's the first

Continued on next page.



Landreths' Seeds: Catalogue 1913 129th Annual Edition National Agricultural Library

genetically modified crop was approved for sale and during that timeframe, seed company consolidation occurred, and monopolies were created to gain control over the seed supply and seed patents as well as to accumulate intellectual property rights. By 2018, four companies consisting of a multi-national pharmaceutical and biotechnology company, an agricultural chemical and seed company, a foreign state-owned chemical company, and an international agricultural co-operative group, controlled the seed market.

On July 9, 2021, the Secretary of Agriculture was directed to submit a report on concerns and strategies for ensuring the intellectual property system that incentivizes innovation does not unduly reduce competition in seed in markets. Under Executive Order No. 14036 "Promoting Competition in the American Economy" issued In March 2023, the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service published the USDA Fair and Competitive Seed Report and presented findings based on public comments on the pertinence of patent standards in plant-related innovation, intellectual property rights, consolidation in competitive markets, public infrastructure around seed systems, resilient supply chains, and plant breeding. The report recommendations included a Farmer Seed Liaison position, a working group, a notice on disclosure compliance per the Federal Seed Act, and expansion of the farmer fairness government portal related to seed market complaints.

Ongoing, efforts are being made to counter seed monopolies, improve access to genetic resources, maintain biodiversity, and increase availability of public domain seeds. There are advocates for heirloom and culturally meaningful seeds, saving seeds, supporting seed networks, seed sovereignty, and expanding acreage for seed farming. The most impactful advancements have been engaging in efforts to change policies. UCFA and seed advocates are working to sustain independent seed sellers, improve the prospects of seed growers, enhance seed libraries, increase public investment in protecting the genetic integrity of seeds, and educate the public to ensure diverse resilient high-quality seeds are available for future generations.

For more information, search the following:

- eCFR :: 7 CFR Part 201 -- Federal Seed Act Requirements
- Federal Seed Act | Agricultural Marketing Service,
- Executive Order on Promoting Competition in the American Economy | The White House
- Promoting Fair Competition and Innovation in Seeds and Other Agricultural Input Industries | Agricultural Marketing Service
- More and Better Choices for Farmers.



FINDING AN ANCESTRAL CONNECTION

Written by Irena Hollowell

n 2024, for the first time, I grew two varieties that felt significantly related to my heritage. Both were accessions from GRIN: a pepper in the species Capsicum baccatum from Uruguay, and a gourd in the species Lagenaria siceraria from Argentina. I don't have a reason to think that any of my ancestors grew these particular varieties, but I do have reason to think they grew varieties similar to these.

Previously of course, I grew crops my ancestors had grown, but as far as I know, the varieties were much different than any my ancestors had grown. And, I hadn't *felt* any particular ancestral connection to them. Aside from Lumper potatoes in Ireland, I have so far only the faintest guesses as to what my ancestors, prior to my own parents, grew in the United States or in Europe.

With the gourd, I felt excited when I opened the packet and saw the deep brown seeds, nearly black. My mother and grandmother, though not prone to drinking mate, did and do have a few mate gourds around the house. This was the first time I held seeds I was excited about because of their connection to my ancestry. I felt excited again when the first cotyledons emerged from the four-pack where I planted four of these seeds, and again when each of the other three seedlings emerged. I felt saddened when their growth was slow, so slow that at the time of first frost I could only find the smallest fruits behind female flower buds, indicating tentatively that this variety probably had the mate gourd shape I was hoping it had.

At the start of the season, I wasn't as excited about the Uruguayan peppers, and didn't expect to feel much connection to them. I don't recall ever hearing my mother or grandmother talk about Uruguayan or Argentine peppers. I selected them mostly because the Uruguayan climate has more in common with ours than Peruvian or Brazilian climates, where I think the most baccatum peppers originate.



no attention to this particular variety, which was largely because it was one of thirty-some peppers I was growing. I labeled the GRIN peppers only with their accession numbers, and I didn't even noticed that it was the Uruguayan variety that at first grew more slowly than most of the other peppers, including more slowly than all the other baccatum peppers I planted.

I put the slower-growing pepper varieties at the end of the two long rows of peppers. Though this variety was late to mature, towards the end of the season, when we were starting to think we might get our first fall frost, I noticed that they had a substantial number of fruits, and their heat level was very mild. And then I looked at my chart of trial varieties and saw that these were the ones from Uruguay. When I ate whole green fruits at an earlier stage of development than we usually harvest green peppers at, I did not detect any heat. And in eating these immature green fruits, I had a vague, faint feeling of being a little more woven into the tapestry of Gaia, and a vague, faint sense that eating these peppers was related to something my ancestors had done, that they had also eaten peppers like these. This experience increased my interest in tasting other pepper varieties at a similar stage, before they reach full size. And then I noticed that the two plants of this variety I planted in that field weren't next to any other baccatum peppers, and then that the nearest baccatum peppers were about forty feet away, so I had reason to conclude that they had not crosspollinated. So, I saved seeds. And I felt, in a way, that many people in our modern society would ridicule, like these peppers might have been encouraging me to save their seeds.



In the middle of the season, I was paying almost

RECIPE Filipino Heritage Recipe

By Menchu Azada Chua
Bitter Melon Stir-fry



Ginisang Ampalaya is a classic Filipino dish that transforms from island to island. My mom's recipe is simple. They also swap out the protein with whatever is available. It's primarily cooking with pork or shrimp and served over jasmine rice or glass noodles. The word Ginisang (or Ginisa) is the Tagalog word for sautéed. You can truly customize this dish for your liking, adding additional vegetables, switching out protein, or adding more or less of a certain ingredient. The hero will be the bittermelon. It's distinct bitter flavor is hard to miss but compliments the other potent flavors of the garlic, ginger, and onions.



Ingredients

- 1 Bitter melon (seeded, halved then sliced into 1/4th of an inch thick)
- 2 Tbsp of vegetable oil
- 3-4 Large garlic cloves (depending on preference)
- 1 Large onion
- 1 knob of ginger (size of thumb)
- ¹/₂ cup of shredded pork or peeled and de-veined shrimp.
- 1⁄4 Tsp Salt
- ¼ Tsp Pepper
- 1 Egg (beaten)
- Optional: Chilis (birds eye chili, Chinese peppers)
- Optional: Added flavor: 1 Tsp oyster sauce, soy sauce, fish sauce or chicken powder

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- Equipment
- Large wok or pan
- Cutting board

Instructions

- Prepare vegetables
- Dice garlic
- Dice onions
- Peel and Julienne ginger into thin long strips.

Cooking

• Heat wok/pan on medium-high for 5 minutes. Then add in Oil

- Heat oil for 2 minutes then add in onions, ginger and garlic. Cook for at least 3-4 minutes. Stir occasionally
- Add half salt and half of pepper
- Add the protein, remaining salt and pepper + any additional flavor enhancers like soy sauce, oyster sauce and etc.
- Sautee for at least 10-15 minutes or till all protein is cooked all the way. For shrimp, it will cook fast.
- Once mixture is cooked, add bitter melon. Do not cover so it's not soggy.
- Sautee for another 5 -7 minutes. Avoid letting the bitter melon get soggy. Should still be crisp to the bite.
- After sauteing the bitter melon, create an partition in the center of the pan / wok, that does not contain the sauteed mixture. Crack the egg and stir till you scramble the egg while in the pan.
- Halfway through scrambling the egg, mix in the rest of the mixture, incorporate the egg into the sautéed bitter melon, meets and vegetables.

To Serve

- Enjoy with fresh rice or noodles.
- Top off with additional herbs like scallions if preferred.
- Squeeze with a little lemon as well if preferred.
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Growing corn in a backyard garden can be an excellent choice for several reasons:

Enjoy Corn's Fresh Flavor: Homegrown corn tastes significantly better than store-bought, as it can be harvested at peak ripeness. The sugars in corn begin to convert to starch shortly after picking, so the fresher, the sweeter.

Fun for the Whole Family: Growing corn can be an educational and fun experience for families, especially for children who can watch the tall plants grow and harvest ears directly from the stalk. These benefits make corn an attractive addition to a backyard garden, especially if space and climate are suitable for this sun-loving crop.

Choose from Many Corn Varieties: Backyard gardeners can grow specialty varieties that aren't available in grocery stores, like heirloom or colorful varieties such as glass gem or sweet white corn.

Vertical Space Utilization: Corn grows vertically, making it a good choice for maximizing garden space. It can be interplanted with other crops in the "Three Sisters" tradition (corn, beans, and squash), where each plant supports the others. Once established, corn requires relatively little maintenance aside from consistent watering and occasional feeding, making it an easy crop for home gardeners.

Corn is Pollinator Friendly: Corn attracts pollinators like bees, which can benefit other crops in the garden. Wind-pollinated corn also helps improve air circulation in gardens. Corn stalks and leaves make good compost material after harvest, enriching the soil for future growing seasons.

variety of ways, depending on its type. Here are some ideas:

- Fresh Corn on the Cob: Enjoy it simply boiled, grilled, or roasted with butter, salt, or herbs.
- **Cornmeal or Flour**: Dry and grind the corn to make cornmeal or flour for homemade cornbread, tortillas, or other baked goods.
- **Popcorn**: If you're growing a popcorn variety, the kernels can be dried and used for homemade popcorn.
- **Canned or Frozen Corn**: Preserve your harvest by canning or freezing corn kernels to enjoy throughout the year.
- **Corn Salsa**: Use fresh kernels in a salsa with tomatoes, onions, and cilantro.
- **Corn Chowder**: Create a hearty soup using your corn with ingredients like potatoes, cream, and bacon.
- **Tamales**: If you grow field corn, you can use the husks for tamales and make masa from the corn.
- **Corn Syrup/Sweeteners**: With some processing, corn can be turned into syrup for use as a sweetener.
- Livestock Feed: Dried corn is often used as feed for chickens, pigs, or other livestock.
- **Decorations**: If you grow ornamental varieties, like Indian corn, the colorful ears can be used for fall decorations.

The corn you grow in your backyard can be used in a 07 | Spring 2025 | Ujamaa Cooperative Farming Alliance | Seed Culture



TIPS ON GROWING CORN

Growing corn in your backyard can be a rewarding experience if you follow some key tips to ensure a successful harvest:

Choose the Right Variety: Select a corn variety suited for your region's growing conditions. Sweet corn is popular for home gardens, but you can also try varieties like popcorn or ornamental corn. Make sure to check the days to maturity and choose one that fits your growing season. At Ujamaa Seeds we have several corn varieties. Select a variety that fits your location, and will be fun to watch grow.

Sun Exposure & Soil Preparation: Corn needs at least 6-8 hours of direct sunlight per day. Make sure your planting site receives full sun for best growth. Corn thrives in well-draining, fertile soil rich in organic matter. Prepare the soil by incorporating compost or well-rotted manure. Ensure the soil is loose and well-aerated to allow root growth.

Planting Corn: Wait until the soil has warmed to at least 60°F (16°C), as corn prefers warm temperatures for germination and growth. You can start planting about two weeks after the last frost date in your area. Plant corn seeds 1-2 inches deep and space them 9-12 inches apart in rows that are about 24-36 inches apart. Corn is wind-pollinated, so plant in blocks or clusters of short rows (at least four rows) rather than one long row to improve pollination. Consider succession planting too extend your harvest, plant a new batch of corn every two weeks for a continuous supply throughout the growing season.

CORN PATCH MAINTENANCE TIPS

Corn requires consistent moisture, especially duringthe germination and tasseling stages. Water deeply once or twice a week, providing about 1 inch of water per week. Avoid wetting the foliage, as it can encourage fungal diseases. Corn is a heavy feeder, so fertilize with a nitrogen-rich fertilizer when the plants are about 6 inches tall, and again when they are about knee-high. You can use compost or a balanced organic fertilizer for this.

Keep the area around your corn free from weeds, especially during the early stages of growth. Weeds can compete with corn for nutrients and water. Mulching around the base of the plants can help suppress weeds and retain moisture.

Watch for common pests like corn earworms, cutworms, and aphids. Handpick pests or use organic pest control methods like neem oil or insecticidal soap. Practice crop rotation to avoid soil-borne diseases. Since corn relies on wind for pollination, gently shaking the plants can help disperse the pollen from the tassels to the silk on the ears. This helps ensure good kernel development.

Harvesting: Corn is ready to harvest when the ears are filled out, and the silks have turned brown. To check for ripeness, peel back a small portion of the husk and puncture a kernel; if the liquid is milky, the corn is ready.

By following these tips, you can enjoy a bountiful corn harvest from your backyard garden! Photo Credit: Kathy Anderson

SAVE THE SEED!

Written by Karen Bowlding

"Seeds are living links in an unbroken chain reaching back into agriculture's antiquity." - UCFA

Legal Liability of Saving Patented Seeds

Unfortunately, too many growers are still planting patented, expired or not, seeds. Under the Plant Variety Protection Act (PVPA), producers are restricted from saving harvested seeds. Before purchasing seeds from any of the big agricultural seed companies, be sure to check with the seed company, read the label, or review signed agreements with a seed company to limit your risk and liability. Moreover, seed growers are prohibited to sell seeds actively under the PVPA. **Many bioengineered seeds are patented; however, not all patented seeds are.** Some seeds are restrictive patents, which prevent growers from saving or breeding seeds.

Heirloom seeds are true-to-type and retain their genetic traits through each generation, produced through natural pollination; no manipulation or alteration of the plants. To protect the seed supply, diversity of crops, and ability to sell your own seeds, growers should sow heirloom seeds. Here at UJAMMA SEEDS, we only grow and sell culturally meaningful heirloom seeds! By purchasing from us, you will support our non-profit UCFA arm to increase the number of BIPOC growers of heirloom seeds. The main concerns of ingesting bio-engineered seeds are the potentiality of antibiotic resistance, allergic reactions, and other adverse effects.

Fennel Seeds



Written by Hassan Adeeb



ow that the Arctic front that brought a wave of cold air and snow to many parts of the United States is fading, gardeners everywhere are feeling itchy about spring's arrival. Spring is a season of renewal and growth, and your garden can reflect that with proper preparation. By tackling these tasks now, you'll set the stage for a lush, thriving garden that brings joy and abundance throughout the growing season.

We all know that a well-thought-out garden plan is the key to a productive and beautiful growing season. Whether you're a seasoned green thumb or a beginner eager to dig in, now's the perfect time to prepare for your spring garden. Here are some essential tasks to help you get started:

Check Out Your Garden Space

Winter offers an excellent opportunity to evaluate your garden layout. Take a walk around your growing areas and ask yourself:

- Are there areas that could be better utilized?
- Do I want to expand or reduce my growing space?
- Are there perennials or shrubs that need dividing or relocating?

Use the camera in your mobile phone to take photos. Turn your camera sideways to landscape mode to get a broad image of your current and potential growing areas. While the amount of sunlight is shorter now than it will be in the Spring and Summer, take note of where you have full sun, shade, or partial shade. Sketch a rough map of your garden to visualize where you'll plant new crops or flowers. You might consider using an AI app to create a garden plan with plants you are considering.

Plan Your Crops

Take time to decide what you'll grow. Consider:

- Which of my vegetables, fruits, or herbs performed well last year?
- Are there new varieties I want to try?
- How much space will each crop require?

Rotate crops to avoid soil depletion and reduce the risk of disease. For example, avoid planting tomatoes where you grew them last year.



Order Seeds and Supplies

<u>UJAMAA SEEDS</u> online collection (https://ujamaaseeds.com).

We offer a wealth of options. Please be aware that many popular items sell out quickly, so order early. Also stock up on garden essentials like compost and soil amendments, mulch, fertilizers, and gardening tools.

Start Some Seeds Indoors

For crops like tomatoes, peppers, and eggplants, starting seeds indoors can give you a head start. Invest in seed trays, grow lights, and a heat mat for the best results. Follow seed packet instructions for timing—many seeds need to be started 6-8 weeks before your last frost date.

To find your average last frost date, these are two useful online resources:

Purdue University's Freeze Date Tool.

Select your county on the map to get your last average freeze date.

The National Gardening Association's <u>Frost Dates by Zip Code</u>.

Prepare Your Soil

The foundation of a successful garden is healthy soil. Once the ground is workable remove debris, such as fallen leaves or old plant material. Test your soil to determine pH and nutrient levels. Add compost, manure, or other organic matter to enrich the soil. Tilling or gently loosen the soil in your growing areas will improve aeration and drainage.

Prune Trees and Shrubs

Late winter to early spring is an ideal time to prune. Remove dead or damaged branches to encourage healthy growth. For fruit trees, proper pruning improves fruit production.

Clean Up and Organize Tools

Inspect your gardening tools and repair or replace any that are damaged. Sharpen pruners and shears, and clean pots and trays to prevent the spread of diseases. Organize your tools in a way that makes them easily accessible. Now's the time to construct raised beds, trellises, or fencing. Don't forget to repair any existing structures that may have been damaged by winter weather.

Plan for Pest and Weed Control

Start thinking about how you'll manage pests and weeds. Consider installing physical barriers, like row covers and applying organic pest deterrents. Also, to suppress weed growth have mulch ready to lay down.

Create a Watering Strategy

Spring rain is helpful, but a consistent watering routine is essential as temperatures rise. Check your irrigation system or set up a rain barrel to conserve water. Mulching around plants can also help retain moisture.

Encourage Pollinators

Bees, butterflies, and other pollinators play a crucial role in garden health. Plant native flowers and flowering herbs to attract these beneficial creatures. Avoid using chemical pesticides that could harm them.

Final Thoughts: Keep a Gardening Journal

Document your garden's progress throughout the year. Note what you plant, where you plant it, and how it performs. This information will be invaluable for future garden planning.



BRIEAKING NEW GROUND SEED-SAVING INNOVATION AND WINTIER SQUASH FOR ALL

Written by Chris Smith Republished with permission from Edible Ashville



Many gardeners are resilient optimists, often heard repeating the mantra, "There's always next year," even in the face of catastrophic failures. Those failures are, in fact, lessons, and as gardens grow so do the gardeners.

The hope for next year, as these lessons are remembered, is captured fully in the month of January, named for the two-faced Roman god Janus. January is when the seed catalogs arrive and the days begin to lengthen. It's the month for planning next year's garden and dreaming of what may be.

Henry David Thoreau said, "I have great faith in seed. Convince me that you have a seed there, and I am prepared to expect wonders." Faith and wonder are fine sentiments, but the critical part of this statement is the existence of the seed. Seeds are tiny packages of ancient and evolving ecological wisdom; a foundational pillar of our food systems. They deserve some respect.

Wondrous Winter Squash Seeds

This year I planted 12 butternut squash seeds, and they all grew. It was a variety called South Anna Butternut, bred for southern conditions. My 12 butternut squash plants rambled over my entire garden and produced an abundant harvest. I now have roughly 48 squash in my basement, each with about 100 seeds inside—which means next year I could grow 4,800 plants and, hopefully, 19,200 butternut squash. That would give me about 1,920,000 seeds. After just two years, I could give every single Asheville resident 20 squash seeds. You won't see that kind of return on Wall Street.

I know what you're thinking: How on earth is Chris going to grow 4,800 squash plants in that dinky 1-acre garden he likes to think of as a microfarm?

It's a good question. I'd need a whole food-focused, agriculturally aware community to pull off this crazy idea. And where would I find one of those in Western North Carolina?

Innovative Seed-Saving Community

Edible Asheville is a good place to start. I believe we can achieve total winter squash sovereignty in our region, where every squash eaten is local and every plant grown is from locally saved seed.

Here's the concept:

- Find an aspirational and visionary nonprofit seed hub that wants to redefine the food system and is willing to take on the project management of an innovative idea. *The Utopian Seed Project.* $\sqrt{}$
- 2 Engage with farmers and community gardens that are able and willing to grow out a single, openpollinated variety of winter squash for each species group (see sidebar). Awesome Asheville farmers and the Asheville Buncombe Community Garden Network. √
- 3 Ask chefs and consumers who purchase winter squash from our awesome farmers (or source them from community gardens) to scoop the seeds into variety-labeled, zip-close bags or containers. *Excellent local chefs and engaged community of consumers.* √
- Organize centralized seed drop-off locations so the Utopian Seed Project can collect, process, clean, and store the seeds. The organization would germination-test the seeds and make them freely available to participating farmers and gardeners to continue the system in future years (aka gift economy in action). *Coordinated community effort*. $\sqrt{}$
 - 5 Sell the surplus seeds to a local seed company with a strong mission and big heart willing to help finance the operational costs of the ongoing project. The company would then package the seeds and sell them to home gardeners. *Sow True Seed.* \checkmark

Note: Home gardens could also participate in the project if the gardeners are able and willing to isolate winter squash varieties (see sidebar).

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Additionally/alternatively: Sell surplus seeds to a local seed oil-processing organization with a community-driven message and a big heart to produce locally grown and pressed squash seed oil. *Asheville Nuttery*. $\sqrt{}$

If you want to be involved in turning this into a reality, please get in touch via chris@utopianseed.org

How to Save Winter Squash Seed

Saving winter squash seed is really easy, because the seeds are ready to harvest when the fruit is ready to eat. A clear example of having your cake *and* eating it.

Winter squash varieties are grouped into four species. For the purpose of seed saving, you should grow just one variety in each species group so the varieties don't crosspollinate. In other words, you want your North Carolina candy roaster melon (*Cucurbita maxima*) to remain a North Carolina candy roaster melon when you plant those saved seeds next year, so don't plant any other *Cucurbita maxima* varieties within about a ¹/₂ mile.*

When you cut open the squash, the seeds should be slimy but firm. The easiest way to clean off the slimy layer is with a quick fermentation: Submerge seeds in water for 24-48 hours, then rinse clean. Lighter, unfirm, floating seeds will not grow and can be discarded.

Spread seeds on a porous surface (coffee filters, drying screens, cardboard) and air-dry until they are brittle; run a fan if humidity is a concern. The seeds should snap cleanly when bent in two. Clean, dry seeds can remain viable for many years when stored in dark, dry, cool conditions.

More information on saving seeds can be found at sowtrueseed.com.

*If you are planting two types of the same variety, or if you're concerned about neighborhood squash plants, you can bag your squash flowers and hand pollinate them.

Asheville already has all the parts of the puzzle to achieve regional winter squash sovereignty, but right now this is just an innovative idea, a winter's dream. However, to co-opt Thoreau: I have great faith in dreams. Convince me that you have a clear dream, and I am prepared o expect wonders.

The Midwest Farmers of Color Collective

Written by Mélina Mangel and Zoe Holloman



Photo Credit Zoe Holloman

The Midwest Farmers of Color Collective (MFCC) is a network of Black, Indigenous, and other farmers of color organizing in the Midwest for racial justice and a food and farming system that honors our communities, past, present, and future.

With a focus on grassroots organizing and racial equity, MFCC was formed to focus on agricultural policy and access to land and capital to produce sustainable farms. The MFCC network is made up of over 130 rural, suburban, and urban farmers, growers, and land & water protectors in Minnesota and the Midwest.

Founded by Executive Director Zoe Holloman, Vera F. Allen, Hindolo Pokawa, Michael Chaney, and Sophia Benrud, MFCC engages in projects that support farmer-led initiatives in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, and other Midwest states. Led by the Coordinating Team of Sammie Ardito Rivera, Sophia Benrud, and Kieran Morris, projects and initiatives include:

- Cultivators Fund, which is an annual all-purpose micro-grant offered to support growers and farmers with emergent needs
- Farmers of color Social Zoom
- Growing Liberation podcast
- Land Access Fund, developing a BIPOC Farmeradvised Land Grant Fund and a low interest loan fund.



Courtesy of Mélina Mangel

- Mapping Midwest Farmers of Color
- Seeding Our Cultural Foods, which is building a farmer of color seed library in North Minneapolis and working to reclaim cultural foods through growing and sharing seeds, building knowledge, and locating and preserving cultural crops.
- Policy Advocacy & Political Education

MFCC also plans events like "Seeds for the Culture." In partnership with Plant-Grow-Share, and Ujamaa Farming Cooperative Alliance, this collaborative day included seed harvesting workshops and community building focused on cultural seeds and the sharing of seed stories.

Political and operational education, telling our stories, social connection, and power building are at the heart of MFCC's work. As a collective, MFCC strives to honor the past of our Black, Indigenous, and farmers of Color (BIPOC) while centering racial justice and developing food and farming systems.

"We are creating lasting connections, a web of teachers and learners, dedicated to our earth, our food and each other. Now is the time to make a shift from an extractive and corporate controlled food system to a resilient regional food system, based on racial equity for farmers of color and agroecology."

https://midwestfarmersofcolor.org/

COMMUNITY GARDEN In a Food Desert

Too many food deserts or as Chef Marly calls it, "food apartheid zones," in urban and rural areas exist in low-income areas populated by marginalized communities of color.

These tax-paying residents have little to no access to nutritious food because of the lack of grocery stores, supermarkets, or other food retailers willing to plant ground and sell fresh vegetables and fruit where they live, leaving them with chronic disease from eating poor-quality food products. The communities with healthy options are too far from the "deserts" for residents to travel as a result of limited or affordable transportation options. One way to tackle this issue is to create community gardens, whether you live there or not. Below are eight recommended steps.

Connect with like-minded growers that are interest beginning and monitoring a project in a food desert.	ted in
Reach out to the neighborhood leaders and youth to get their participation in such a project.	gauge
If they are willing to join the endeavor, together name benefits to their community to get buy-in from residents.	ne the other
Figure out a suitable and accessible location, one adequate sunlight, good soil, and available water.	with
Build a team of community members that are willing to sweat equity to plan, coordinate, set up rules policies, plan for produce and tool sharing, and kee garden. Seek help from local garden centers or clubs.	to pay and p the
Develop a reasonable budget and seek out funding from county government, non-profits, resource-rich busin in your area, and private donors.	m the nesses
Once enough funding is obtained, prepare the sit reduce burnout and frustration, assign a team for task.	e. To each
Celebrate harvest with a community event where residents can get healthy foods at little to no cost. ensure that the elderly and young children are pro- with healthy food.	e the Let's wided

UCFA Out and About

This photo essay features UCFA members at workshops, conferences, and farm visitations during the 2024-2025 Fall and Winter months. To the right UCFA member Ebony Malone conducted a hands-on workshop demonstrating how easy it is to make cabbage sauerkraut at the Greenbelt (MD) Community Center. To the right center, UCFA members Rick Carter, Fatimah Hasan, Kathy Anderson, Karen Bowlding, Bonnetta and Hassan Adeeb gathered with others in November at a screening of Firmly Planted: Honoring the Work & Resistance of the Black Woman Farmer in Baltimore, MD. To the right at the bottom UCFA founder Bonnetta Adeeb receives a Community Engagement Award at Princeton University's John Pace, Jr '39 Center for Civic Engagement back in November. Also pictured is Dr. Tessa Desmond, and Dr. Hanna Garth of Princeton University. Below, UCFA members Nate Kleinman, of Experimental Farming Network (EFN) along with Bonnetta Adeeb, and Dr.Tessa Desmond view the bounty of ripe Maycock summer squash, an heirloom squash of the Nanticoke people that was harvested at The Seed Farm at Princeton.









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Pictured at the top, UCFA members **Diane Fisher, Kathy Anderson**, and **Karen Bowlding** sold seeds, books, and knit hats at the 2025 Future Harvest Conference held in Silver Spring, MD back in January. Above **Bonnetta Adeeb** speaks with a workshop attendee at the 2025 Virginia Association for Biological Farming (VABF) Conference in Roanoke, VA held at the historic Hotel Roanoke and Conference Center in January. Also attending the 2025 VABF Conference, and pictured to the left are UCFA members **Rick Carter, Tomia MacQueen** of Wildflower Farm, **Chris Smith** of The Utopian Seed Project, **Hassan Adeeb**, **Chris Keeve, Amyrose Foll** of Virginia Free Farm, and **Bonnetta Adeeb**. Above to the left and centered is UCFA founder **Bonnetta Adeeb** along with John Jackson of Comfort Farms and STAG VETS, and **Ira Wallace** of Southern Exposure Seed Exchange.





Pictured at the top, many UCFA members, partners, growers, and friends attended the 2025 Organic Seed Growers Conference held in Corvallis, Oregon on February 26 - March 2. This biennial gathering of agroecological seed communities in the U.S. and across the world creates spaces where experienced and emerging seed stewards can convene in timely conversations, educational trainings, and strategy sessions. Above to the left is Diane Fisher and LuAnna Nesbitt, and above in the center is Chris Keeve. They are visiting a farm during the 2024 Carolina Farm Stewardship Association (CFSA) back in November. Pictured above to the right is UCFA founder Bonnetta Adeeb along with Vivien Sansour, founder and director of the Palestine Heirloom Seed Library, Vivien and Bonnetta were panel speakers for Seedkeeping and Remembering, an event held in February at Drexel University's Dornsife Center for Neighborhood Partnerships. Also pictured are Talia Charidah, and Ashley Gripper of the Ubuntu Center on Racism, Global Movements & Population Health Equity at Drexel University. After attending the 2024 Detroit National Urban Agriculture Conference in August, UCFA members visited the urban garden of Jeffrey Atto of the Iraqi Seed Collective which stewards numerous Iraqi trees, shrubs, and vegetables. To the right at the bottom, UCFA founder Bonnetta Adeeb is with Vivien Sansour, founder and director of the Palestine Heirloom Seed Library, Dr.Tessa Desmond of The Seed Farm at Princeton and Chris Smith of The Utopian Seed Project, following one of their workshops at the 2025 Organic Seed Growers Conference in Corvallis, OR.

















Pictured at the top to the left, UCFA members visited the seed cleaning facilities, and the high tunnels at USDA's Norman Berg Plant Materials Center in Beltsville, MD. USDA has purchased UJAMAA SEEDS for plantings at the People's Garden in Washington, D.C. At the top to the right, Ebony Malone and Rick Carter prepare bags with fresh vegetables for the Holiday for Hope food donations,an effort in collaboration with Three Part Harmony, and the DC Metro HBCU Alumni Alliance. Above at the 2024 meeting of the Federation of Southern Cooperatives in Alabama and Mississippi, Bobby Wilson of Metro Atlanta Urban Farm, and Collie Graddick of the Sherrod Institute met up with other UCFA members, Justice Madden, Roxanne Masters, Nate Kleinman, and Bonnetta Adeeb. Pictured in the center to the left Ebony Malone, along with Amirah Mitchell of Sistah Seeds, Amyrose Foll of Virginia Free Farms, and Bonnetta Adeeb, are at a past VABF Conference. To the left Courtney Streett of Native Roots Farm Foundation, along with Bonnetta Adeeb, and Nate Kleinman, are at a Nanticoke Squash celebration in Delaware. More than a decade ago Nate began a journey of rematriating the squash seeds to Nanticoke people in the diaspora.

SEED FARMING EDUCATION

RMINGAL

ANNUAL REPORT H



143 ENROLLED IN SEED FARMING CLASSES

via the Ujamaa Academy and the Ira Wallace Seed School.



10 SEED FARMING HUBS ESTABLISHED

nationwide with materials and technical assistance in seed farming.

4 COLLARDZ 4 KIDZ

programs established across the nation. Youth from pre-school to high school in 9 states participated in school, after school, and in community programs in UCFA's Collard Seed Breeding Pilot Program.

SEED FARMING

35_{PLUS} HEIRLOOM CROPS GROWN FOR SEED

at Tayman Field in Upper Marlboro, Maryland. Varieties included squashes, gourds, beans, peas, okras, collards, peppers, eggplants, and cucumbers, tree nursery, and



33 PARTNER GROWERS

As a result of UCFA seed farming education, UCFA supported seed hubs, and UCFA outreach, 33 partner growers submitted seeds for the 2025 UJAMAA SEEDS catalog.



2024 TOP SELLERS Top Sellers for the period of January 1, 2024 - December 31, 2024



COMING SOON The 2025 UJAMAA SEEDS Catalog



SEED SALES

63% INCREASE IN SEED

SALES Our seed sales continue to grow. 2023 sales increased 54% over 2022 sales. And 2024 seed sales increased 63% over 2023 seed sales. Total orders also increased 83% in 2024.

395 SEED VARIETIES

Launching in January of 2022 Ujamaa Seeds has expanded from 136 seed varieties to almost 400 seed varieties in our 2025 catalog.







CHEROKEE TRAIL OF TEARS BEAN









E E D S 2025









