

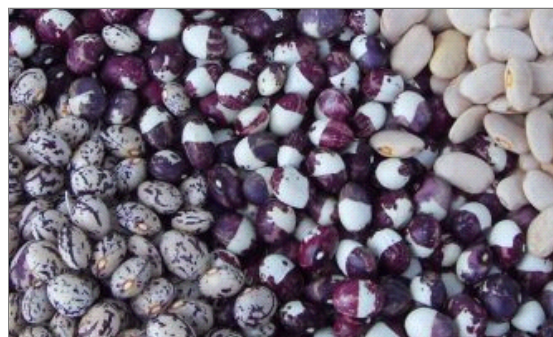
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Tuesday 8 December 2009

Green-fingered guardians ensuring seed species survival



L-R Bridgewater, Majorcan pea, and Blue Coco beans

The natural history of our fruit and vegetables is in safe hands, thanks to Nottingham Trent University's role in an initiative to protect the genetic heritage of seeds. The University is the first in the country to have been selected to act as 'Seed Guardian' for Garden Organic's 'Heritage Seed Library', working to ensure the long term survival of the original gene pools of species that are in danger of being lost forever.

Many of the modern day forms of fruit and vegetables are either genetically modified or hybrid versions developed to cope with the demands of commercial production. Programmes of in-breeding and hybridisation amongst certain species have meant that over time their genetic diversity has decreased and the original genetic make-up of some varieties is lost. The loss of these varieties is of concern, not only because it means we are gradually losing elements of our cultural heritage, but also because the new genetic make-up may make them more susceptible to disease.

Nottingham Trent University was selected to act as a Seed Guardian for the Heritage Seed Library following its use of a number of important species in an award winning garden exhibited at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show in 2008.

Earlier this year, the University was invited to select nine species of plants to cultivate, and thousands of their seeds were then harvested and returned to the Heritage Seed Library for safe-keeping. Of the nine varieties grown, two were entrusted to Nottingham Trent University's special care as Seed Guardians, owing to their rare and endangered status - the Majorcan Pea Bean and the Suttons Harbinger Pea. The Majorcan Pea Bean is thought to be one of the earliest beans to ever be cultivated in Europe and reference to it can be found in texts and documents dating back to the late 16<sup>th</sup> Century.

Caroline Wright, lecturer in horticulture at Nottingham Trent University's School of Animal, Rural and Environmental Sciences said: "The work of the Heritage Seed Library and our role as Seed Guardian is crucial to ensuring the long term survival of these species. The educational benefits that this work brings to our students are also extremely important and we're looking forward to the next growing season to see what other varieties we might be involved in."

“ The work of the Heritage Seed Library and our role as Seed Guardian is crucial to ensuring the long term survival of these species.

Caroline Wright, Horticulture lecturer at Nottingham Trent University

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Garden Organic is the UK's leading organic growing charity. Its Heritage Seed Library was set up to protect rare and endangered vegetables and it currently maintains a collection of

over 800 varieties at its headquarters, Ryton Gardens in Warwickshire. The Heritage Seed Library is supported by members as well as a dedicated network of Seed Guardians across the UK.

For press enquiries about Garden Organic contact Charlotte Corner on +44 (0)24 76217707 or via [email](#).

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