

Seedhead News



A photograph of several dried sunflower heads and scattered seeds on a grey mesh background. The sunflower heads are brown and have lost their petals, showing the intricate patterns of the seed heads. Some seeds are scattered around the heads.

Dear Friend of Native Seeds/SEARCH,

I am exceptionally grateful to you for supporting us through the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic. Your membership dues, donations, and online purchases ensured our conservation efforts did not end during the mandated shutdown. As I write this letter, the retail store is still closed and critical programs are continuing to operate at the Conservation Center. Over the past three months, despite the challenges, more than 3,000 packets of seed were delivered to families through the Native American Seed Request program.

My thoughts are with those of you, including our Tribal partners and their families on reservations, who are especially vulnerable to the Coronavirus. For many, it is difficult to access nutritious food. It is a painful reminder of what food security truly means, and how crucial seed conservation is today.

All of us at Native Seeds/SEARCH are here because we believe in the power of food from one's own garden. As we continue to live through a global pandemic, we are tasked to teach and support new growers who are empowering themselves through their gardens.

We are committed to conserving and stewarding arid-adapted seeds. With the help of people like you, we can strengthen new partnerships with growers and plant more seed varieties. Much like the seeds in our care, our community is one of resilience, compassion, and generosity that I know will endure. Together we will heal and thrive.

With wishes for your good health,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Raquel E. Aviles".

Raquel E. Aviles

Raquel E. Aviles
Chair, Board of Directors

Seedheads Speak



@sprinkledwithplants

“This is Marina-- she is three years old and loves harvesting broccoli straight from the garden! We love growing edible fruits and veggies in our garden. We have had amazing success with our seeds from NS/S. Almost all of them germinate and take, so much that we have an abundance of vegetable starts. The beautiful thing of gardening is that we get to share our extra garden starts within our community! Gardening with kids is so much fun. I would encourage any parent or caregiver with children to start a garden, even if it’s just container gardening in a smaller space.”



@petalkeeper

“I was hanging out in the garden when this cutie little butterfly came by and asked to be in the picture! She flitted from lupine to lupine before flying away into a Palo Verde. As much as I love hiking to see wildflowers this time of year, I love even more walking into my backyard and being greeted by my own wildflowers. If you’re interested in growing your own wildflowers, I highly recommend @nativeseedssearch out of Tucson!”



James Blue, Member

“We absolutely love growing arugula from Native Seeds. We eat it in salads, winter and spring, and eventually let it go to seed so the bees can enjoy the flowers and we can save the seeds for our next planting.”



THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY

BY SHERYL JOY,
COLLECTIONS CURATOR

REMEMBER TO LOOK FOR THE STORIES BEHIND THE STORIES. WHENEVER PEOPLE INTERACT WITH SEEDS THERE ARE ALWAYS STORIES ... BUT WE RARELY KNOW THE WHOLE STORY. YORI CAHUI IS A PERFECT EXAMPLE.

As I was updating photos for our website, sorting through all the images of our cowpea collection and its 31 accessions, I suddenly noticed that one was different. Instead of bearing 6-8" long pods like the others, the pods on Yori Cahui were well over a foot long. That made this accession pretty special ... a "long bean" from Mexico! Unfortunately, we don't have much information about this cowpea variety. We know only that it was collected in Ahome, near the Gulf of California in northwestern Sinaloa, and it was associated with the Mayo people. The records are unclear about who collected it and when, though it was likely in the 1980's. But nothing about the

farmer who grew it, where s/he got the seeds or how they were used. Sadly, not much of a story there.

I grew up in the Southeast, so the story I learned about cowpeas is that they were brought to the U.S. by or with enslaved Africans. Somehow, in spite of massive hardship some enslaved people managed to nurture those seeds in their new and bitter world. These crops are now a staple cuisine in the Southeastern U.S. But the story in the western part of the continent is different. Cowpea researcher Ira Herniter of Rutgers University visited NS/S recently and shared with us his work tracing the history of cowpea varieties and their migration around the globe. As is true for all cowpeas, the varieties found in Indigenous and Latinx communities in the west originated in sub-Saharan Africa, where cowpeas were domesticated by 3000 BCE. But they were brought here not by Africans but via the Spanish, possibly starting with Hernando de Alcorón in 1540.

Yori Cahui, being a long-bean type, had a different path. Cowpeas traveled hand by hand from Africa via traders and travelers not only to Europe but also to Southeast Asia. Years upon years of selecting these plants in Asian cultures produced the long bean

subspecies, *Vigna unguiculata* ssp. *sesquipedalis*. And long beans likely traveled to western North America with the Chinese. Hundreds of thousands of Chinese people migrated to the west in the late 1800's. In northern Mexico they started small businesses and factories, and worked as farmers and laborers. They grew to become the largest foreign colony in Mexico at the time of the Mexican Revolution, when anti-Asian attitudes exploded. The Chinese were subjected to violent looting, extortion, discriminatory laws and mob attacks that increased until most were forced to leave the country by 1930s. So it's likely that Yori Cahui came to Sinaloa with a Chinese migrant, perhaps a farmer or storekeeper, during this period. Somehow the seeds were shared with or purchased by a Mayo farmer. The term Yori means "non-native" or "white", so the name denotes that the variety came from outside the Mayo community. But it was adopted there and continued to be grown for at least another 80 years ... and perhaps is still grown there.

And so we have moved from "not much of a story" to a rich one, though we must guess at many details. Like many seed stories it is full of the interplay between plants and people, the stresses of human migrations around the world and, regrettably, human mistreatment of other humans. But it also points to the richness of human interactions, and the ways in which our lives, our foods and our histories are intertwined even when we don't realize it.

So the next time you plant a seed, think about its story. Then look for the story behind the story, and be grateful for all those people (and their stories) that allowed this seed to find you. Yori Cahui will be grown at the NS/S Conservation Center this summer and is part of this year's Adopt-A-Crop campaign.

Notes:

1. Thanks to Ken Greene of Seedshed in a workshop at the 2020 Organic Seed Growers Conference.
2. Herniter, Ira A., Muñoz-Amatriáin, María, Close, Timothy J. (2020) Historic Global Spread of Cowpea. Not yet published.
3. Hu-DeHart, Evelyn. (1980) Immigrants to a Developing Society: The Chinese in Northern Mexico 1875-1932. *Journal of Arizona History* Vol. 21 #3.



Yori Cahui seeds from our collection, ready to be planted!

FAMILY REUNION

BY NOAH SCHLAGER,
CONSERVATION PROGRAM MANAGER

Not long ago at a conference in Corvallis, Oregon, I was reunited with three long lost relatives. Deep brown with crimson patterns not unlike a cranberry bean, I came to hold and care for three extremely rare beans which came originally from the Poarch Band of Creek Indians, of which I am a descendant. My grandmother has spoken to me quite a bit about all the seeds her parents would grow and save each year, but over the years most of those seeds were lost. These Strawberry Corn Hill Beans came into my hands by way of Cherokee seedkeeper Kris Hubbard. Kris stewards many Indigenous heirloom seeds and generously shared these beans and several others connected to my Mvskoke and Catawba/Siouan ancestors— on the condition I grow them out and assist in their rematriation. I had to wipe my eyes to look at them clearly, feeling their long journey and the responsibility of being the latest in a long line of Mvskoke and other Indigenous people to grow these seeds.

In my role here at Native Seeds/SEARCH, I have begun to facilitate for others what Kris did for me. The seeds in the collection came from particular farmers, families, clans, villages, and nations still alive today, too many of whom NS/S has lost contact with. Indigenous peoples and our seeds have been in relation with each other over an immense expanse of time, and the seeds are waiting to begin that relationship again. NS/S has stewarded an incredible diversity of seeds which might otherwise have been lost. It is time to ensure that these seeds are living within the communities that they belong to. We are working to systematically reconnect with and listen to those Indigenous farmers and communities, to hear what they want the future of their seeds to be. We are reaffirming that the seeds are their intellectual property and relatives, and we are following their directions in the conservation of these seeds.

Native Seeds has stewarded an incredible diversity of seeds which might otherwise have been lost. It is time to ensure that these seeds are living within the communities that they belong to.

This does mean that certain varieties are no longer being sold to the public. It also means certain varieties may be completely returned back to families and Tribes that they originated from. We will assist Tribal Organizations and our partners as requested to establish seeds banks and provide support and resources to the Indigenous farmers growing those varieties. Varieties appropriate to share are still available for the general public, and we hope to develop new relationships with Indigenous farmers to make seeds they want to sell available to NS/S patrons.

In restoring these relationships, we are inviting you to develop new relationships to these seeds, the land, and the people they belong to. All of us are being offered an opportunity to receive something much more than the physical seeds themselves, an opportunity to be allies in the ongoing story of these seeds and their peoples.



Navajo students learn how to make seed screens at a recent seed saving workshop.



Weywi Cupelli vivid “flowers” in bloom this past spring, formerly labeled as the Alamos Amaranth in the NS/S collection.



Apache Dipper Gourds await processing at a White Mountain Apache festival.

Original Names

BY LAURA JONES,
DISTRIBUTION MANAGER

NS/S is working to call seed varieties by their Indigenous names when and where available. These should be the seeds’ true names, already familiar to the nations and communities to whom the seeds belong. NS/S honors those who developed them and passed them along over generations. In changing the names we strive to do the following:

- 1 **Re-center the collection on Native people**
- 2 **Keep the intimacy and personhood of seeds alive**
- 3 **Honor the seeds and the names as they were given in the communities to whom they belong**

This is a process, begun here, but certainly not at its end. If you stumble over a name, it’s okay, but give it a try! We are all learning.

Also, if you have insight into any of the names that seem inaccurate or could be changed or modified to better match what they are called in their community or communities of origin, please contact:

Noah Schlager
Conservation Program Manager
nschlager@nativeseeds.org

COMMUNITY SEED GRANTEE

WHETSTONE PRISON PROJECT BY MICHELLE LANGMAID



With a piping hot, burnt cup of gas station coffee, Jack (NS/S volunteer) and I head down South Wilmot Road towards what appears to be nothingness. There's really no reason for anyone to go this way unless they're on the road crew, lost, or in our case-headed to prison. We have remarkably little to say to each other, probably because of the discomfort that comes with confronting the realities of our justice system. Nonetheless, we are excited and honored to have been invited to discuss seed saving. Best of all, we'll get our hands in the dirt with a group of men enrolled in an environmental workshop at the Whetstone Unit of the Arizona State Prison Complex.

Founded in 2018 by a University of Arizona student, the Whetstone Prison Project meets every other week to promote awareness of environmental issues, develop skills, and combat recidivism. The program continues to be managed by students and alumni. Erin, who affectionately refers to the group as "the guys", meets us at the gate and we head into the visitors' lounge with several 5-gallon buckets full of seeds, a fan for wind winnowing, and more tools. After a brief discussion of the importance of biodiversity for our food system, we split up into groups to sort beans, process sorghum, and winnow

sunflowers. It doesn't take long for the group of 20 to finish processing all of the seeds we've brought, so we head out to the garden to plant. The Prison Project recently received a Community Seed Grant from Native Seeds - their first one! All of the produce grown in the garden will be donated to the food bank. The guys are only permitted to work in the garden once every two weeks, so productivity is paramount as we enter the concertina wire-bound space. Plots have been assigned to two or three guys each, and they've chosen which seeds they want to plant. Everyone seems in high spirits as a full day's worth of work is compressed into just under two hours.

In a place where people are referred to only by their last name and freedoms are scarce, the incarcerated students find respite in this program. Most are serving less than five years. Their enthusiasm for growing food is easily noticed as they chide each other about the appropriate composition of compost to soil, or rib the one who's just planted a crooked line of beans. Many talk about what they'll plant in their own gardens once they're released, and take a seedlisting with them to begin that familiar ritual of selecting seeds for the next season.

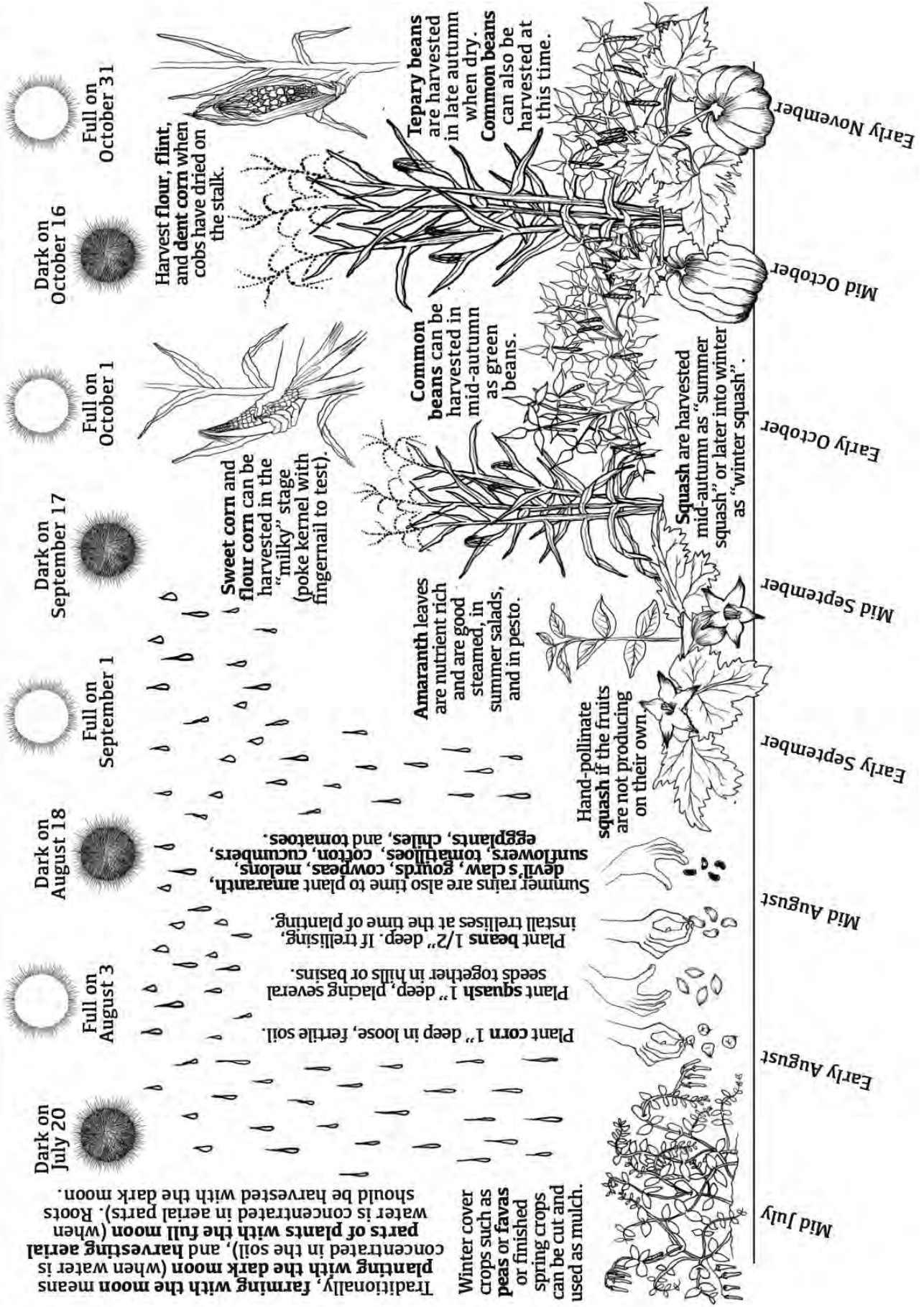
**"WITH OUR PLANTS
BEING DONATED, IT
FEELS LIKE WE'RE
HELPING TO MAKE A
DIFFERENCE, EVEN
FROM IN HERE."**

-- WORKSHOP
PARTICIPANT

Monsoon Planting Calendar

by Ray Younghans

As weather patterns are shifting, here is a guide for "monsoon planting" in the absence of actual monsoons. You will want to plant with any rain that comes between July and mid-August.



VENDOR HIGHLIGHT: WIL TAYLOR

Wil Taylor, a local artist, was born and raised in the wilderness of Washington State, and later lived off grid in the Sonoran Desert. He began his journey with the guidance of his grandfather, who - being a Klickitat native - instilled in him, through song, story and example, the spirit and meaning of nature.

Native Seeds/SEARCH was delighted to host Wil in February. His paintings, hung throughout the store, were inspiring and uplifting to all who walked in. Wil's images magnify the beauty of Sonoran Desert flora and fauna, and his focus on delicate wildflower and saguaro blossoms, intricately patterned insects and colorful birds, visually amplifies their exquisite details for us to enjoy. Seeds and sprouts are powerful personal symbols for Wil and these images are frequently found in his work. Wil's artwork fosters deeper awareness, appreciation and respect for the essential interplay between plants and pollinators, which is deeply gratifying for him as an artist and resonates with the mission of NS/S.

Pictured: Wil Taylor painting (top); Manduca Quinquemecul



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Chiltepin Mesquite Tortillas

Submitted by Heidi DeDannan

Yields: 12, 8" tortillas

Ingredients

1¾ cups All Purpose Flour

¼ cups Mesquite Flour

½ tsp Salt

2 dashes Ground Chiltepin for flavor

OR 3 dashes for spice

OR 4 dashes for heat

¾ cup Water

3 Tbsp Olive Oil

Directions

1. Combine ingredients, knead just until smooth, rest 30 min
2. Warm pan over medium heat, oil optional but not necessary
3. Divide the dough equally into 12 balls, don't over-knead
4. With a tortilla press or rolling pin, flatten balls into very thin 8 in circles
5. Cook on warmed pan until slight bubbling, 1-2 min
6. Once bubbling, flip, cook other side for the same amount of time
7. Remove from pan, place into warmed towel or foil to keep warm

Troubleshooting

Dough is sticky before resting: Too much water

Dough is sticky after resting: Allow to rest longer

Tortilla is stiff: Dough over-kneaded

Tortilla is brittle: Not enough water

Tortilla is undercooked: Press/Roll dough thinner

A NOTICE TO OUR SUPPORTERS

Due to the threatened status of White Sage (*Salvia apiana*) in its native habitat of Southern California, Native Seeds/SEARCH will no longer be carrying White Sage bundles. Several Indigenous groups of California have requested that the public help protect this plant in the wild and refrain from using White Sage. In support, NS/S has decided not to perpetuate the threat of this plant in the wild.

Alternatively, we encourage you to grow or obtain other plants that work well in dried bundles, such as sagebrush, lavender, rosemary, thyme, rose, mullein, and mugwort.



"Sonoran Chiltepin"

Illustration by Alejandra Jimenez



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www.nativeseeds.org
520-622-0830

Native Seeds/SEARCH is a 501(c)3 nonprofit whose mission is to conserve and promote arid-adapted crop diversity to nourish a changing world. We work within the southwestern United States and northwestern Mexico to strengthen regional food security.



Retail Store is Now Online!

For the health and safety of our customers, we have closed our retail store until further notice.

While the retail store is closed, you can find most NS/S products and supplies online at www.nativeseeds.org. Shop with ease for your favorite regional ingredients, Native arts, seeds and more on our website!

Every purchase benefits seed conservation and the communities we serve.

