

## *Module 11, Lesson 4 Handout:*

### **Hybrids & Heirlooms**

Hybrids and heirlooms are terms we see and hear all the time, but not every client will fully understand what these words truly mean. With all the terminology in the produce department, it can be confusing to know what to buy, especially for those clients who are skeptical and looking to avoid GMO crops. Our role as health practitioners is to clear up any confusion our clients might have about food, help them add in more nutrient dense foods to their diets (hello fruits and vegetables) and find ways to shift their lifestyle habits to improve their health. Here's the scoop on hybrids and heirlooms so you'll be better prepared to answer client questions and encourage variety in their diets.

#### **First, some definitions.**

**Heirlooms** are the oldest of the seeds. They are not GMO and are not a special species of plants. The term heirloom is used to describe *any* type of vegetable or fruit seed that has been saved for the next year's planting and grown for a period of years and is passed down by the gardener that preserved it. In order to be called an heirloom, the seed must be open-pollinated, which means pollinated only with another heirloom of the same variety, so that it will grow true to the seed.

Basically, heirloom is like royalty marrying royalty. Plants are called "heirloom" because their seeds come from a lineage that makes them special and specific. Heirloom tomatoes are one of the most coveted seeds and are often featured at markets and in restaurants. Heirloom fruits and vegetables tend to be unique in shape, size, texture, and flavor and can be harder to transport in conventional ways.

**Hybrid plants** are essentially crossbreeds. Basically, two different fruits or vegetables are naturally bred to take the best features from both of their parents to produce new varieties that are unique. For example, a Meyer lemon is a cross between a lemon and a mandarin orange. Hybrids can happen naturally in nature -- they do all the time! They can also be cultivated and bred by man, and the technology is not controversial or dangerous in any way. Hybrids are NOT GMO, which we've talked about in another lesson.

#### **Some examples of common hybrids are:**

- Sweet corn
- Olympia lettuces

- Meyer lemons
- Sunglow corn
- Better boy tomatoes, which fight wilting and plant problems
- Rabbage, which is a cross between radish and cabbage
- Pomato, which produces a potato underground and a tomato on the top of the plant and can be eaten raw or cooked
- Tayberry, a cross between a blackberry and a raspberry
- Plumcot, combining a plum with the best of the apricot
- Tangelo, a tangerine-orange combo
- Blood limes, which cross a lime with a mandarin, and these tiny limes have a deep red color and refreshing zest
- Yuzu and the Josta berry are combinations of several types of plants -- the Yuzu a citrus combo and the Josta is a combo of different berries
- Limequats and Ugly fruits are both citrus blends

This is by no means an exhaustive list. There are many unique and delicious hybrids out there. Encourage your clients to get adventurous at their farmers markets and report back to you on all the fun different produce they try. Adding more variety to their diets will add more nutrition and supporting the local farmers who grow these unique foods will typically be good for the environment and community.