



Seeds of Tucson City of Gastronomy

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Native Seeds/SEARCH is a nonprofit organization that seeks to find, protect, and preserve the seeds of the people of the Greater Southwest so that these arid adapted crops may benefit all peoples and nourish a changing world.

In 2015, Tucson was the first city in the United States designated as a World City of Gastronomy by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). When people hear the word gastronomy they often think of upscale restaurants, but this plays only a small role in the designation. The concept of gastronomy encompasses foodways – the intersection of food in culture, traditions, and history. There are many unique crops and wild food traditions that have been a part of regional foodways for centuries and continue to be kept alive today, particularly by Tohono O’odham and Yoeme (Yaqui) farmers. Tucson’s gastronomy has also been greatly influenced by the Spanish and by Indigenous people from Mexico. The blending of Indigenous, Spanish, and Mexican cuisine has resulted in a truly unique borderlands food culture. Tucson’s foodways continue to be shaped by fresh and new ways to use ancient ingredients, a thriving local food movement, and its concentration in innovative food biodiversity conservation programs such as those at Native Seeds/SEARCH. The work of Native Seeds/SEARCH includes preservation of these important seeds and crops, and more from around the Southwestern US and Northwestern Mexico.

If you are a gardener or farmer interested in celebrating the City of Gastronomy designation we encourage you to plant some of the amazing seed diversity that has contributed to the gastronomic culture and history of the Tucson area. The seeds suggested here have deep roots in the region. They are all well adapted to the area and their flavors evoke place-based food memories.

Corn

Suggested Varieties: Chapalote Pinole Maize ZP090, Dia de San Juan Corn ZD084, Tohono O’odham 60-day Corn ZF016, Yoeme Blue Corn ZF024, Yoeme Vatchi Corn ZD088

Archeologists have found prehistoric cobs of corn in the Santa Cruz River Valley dating back to 4100 years ago. This is among the oldest evidence of maize cultivation in the entire US. This ancient corn had dark, glassy ker-

nels and slender cobs, like its larger descendent which is known as chapalote. Chapalote fell out of cultivation in this region sometime after Spanish colonization, but ethnobotanists reintroduced Chapalote seed from Mexico in the 20th century. Native Seeds/SEARCH stewards several Chapalote strains for use now and into the future. Chapalote kernels, when ground, make a richly colored, flinty corn meal unlike any other. It is often toasted then ground to make pinole.

The Borderlands region is also known for corn varieties that thrive with the monsoon rains. Flour corn varieties like Tohono O’odham 60-day are typically harvested in the milk stage after just two months of growing. This green corn is roasted, often over mesquite, and dried to make *chicos* (Spanish) or *Ga’ivsa* (O’odham). Other varieties include Mexican June corn types which are traditionally planted on the San Juan feast day on June 24. These are large-eared dent corn varieties that are used to make green corn tamales or harvested when dry, nixtamalized (soaked and cooked with lime to remove hull) to make hominy or ground into masa for tortillas.

Tepary Beans

Suggested Varieties: Big Fields White Tepary PT109, Black PT082, Santa Rosa Brown PT120, Menager’s Dam Brown PT119, Santa Rosa White PT111, Tohono O’odham White PT116, Yoeme Brown PT078

Tepary beans were domesticated from native wild beans by Indigenous peoples living in the Sonoran desert starting 4000 years ago. These small beans mature quickly and are tolerant of low desert heat, drought and alkaline soils. They are among the most drought and heat-tolerant crops in the world. Tepary beans are high in protein and contain soluble fiber helpful in controlling cholesterol and diabetes. Generally white tepary beans have a slightly sweet flavor and brown tepary beans have an earthy flavor. There are also black, pink, and speckled varieties. Teparies are used almost exclusively as a dried bean. They work well in soups and stews as well as in purees and spreads. Tepary beans thrive in the mid-summer monsoon rains characteristic of the Sonoran Desert.

Chiltepin

Suggested Varieties: Rock Corral Canyon Chiltepin DC026, Sonoran Chiltepin, DC080

Chiltepin are tiny, pea-sized wild chiles native to the borderlands though northern South America. Most domesticated chiles and peppers are descended from wild chiltepin, thanks to ancient seed savers and plant breeders who began to domesticate chiles 7,000 years ago in central Mexico. Heat level can vary depending on the plant and the amount of water but in general chiltepin are very hot — ranking similarly to habaneros. They have a distinctive smoky flavor. Chiltepin are synonymous with Sonoran cuisine. Typically eaten as crushed flakes after they have dried or green fruits preserved in vinegar, chiltepin are added to salsas, soups, or cheese. But they can add a special flavor kick to any dish.

White Sonora Wheat

Suggested Varieties: White Sonora WH001

Soft white bread wheat was introduced to the southwest by Catholic missionaries from Spain and Italy as early as 1640. The first variety to adapt well to this region was given the name White Sonora, and by 1840 it became the single most favored grain for flour tortillas in the region. Its dough could be stretched into giant sobaquera tortillas, which helped to create the now-famous burritos and chimichangas of the area. During the Civil War, Pima Indian farmers and their Hispanic neighbors produced millions of pounds of White Sonora Wheat for long distance trade, and their flour kept thousands of Yankee and Rebel troops from dying of hunger. By the early 1900's farming of this crop had almost disappeared, but some holdout farmers donated small samples of their seed stock to Native Seeds/SEARCH. NS/S has helped to preserve these seeds and now recent sustainable agriculture and local food movements have helped return it to popularity.

Squash

Suggested Varieties: Tohono O'odham Ha:l Squash EA014, Moctezuma Cushaw EA042, Yoeme Segualca EM040

Wild ancestors of domesticated squashes are native to the Americas. Domestication began in Mexico more than 8000 years ago, and spread into the Southwest around 4,000 years ago with other agricultural crops like maize. Cucurbita argyrosperma (cushaw) and Cucurbit moschata (butternut/big cheese) species are the most common in

the Sonoran desert region as they tolerate the heat and dryness better than other species, particularly Cucurbita maxima (hubbard). Cucurbita pepo (pumpkins) also have an ancient history in the area. Cushaws, rarely found outside of the borderlands, have particularly diverse uses, as they can be eaten as small immature squash as well as large mature squash. The flowers and seeds and vine tips are also eaten. Traditional O'odham and Mexican cushaw preparations include slicing squash into long spirals, called *bichicoris* in Spanish, that are sun dried. These are then boiled to reconstitute for use during the winter. Big Cheese varieties are often prepared with piloncillo sugar and cinnamon.

Legumes

Suggested Varieties: O'odham Pink Bean PC063, O'odham Vayos Bean PC062, Tohono O'odham Vayo Amarillo PC131, Yoeme Purple String Bean PC071, O'odham Green Pea Q020, Tohono O'odham U's Mu:n Cowpea V006, Yori Cahui V003

Tepary beans are the most typical bean in the region but other legumes are also important. Local yellow, pink, ojo de cabra, and pinto varieties of common beans have been present in this area for at least the last hundred years and likely have a very ancient history. European introductions of peas, lentils, favas (habas), and garbanzos are also part of regional foodways. They grow well in the low desert during the cooler months, complimenting warm season legumes like tepary and common beans. Cowpeas, also a European introduction with African origins, grow very well in the low desert heat. There are diverse regional varieties in a range of colors.

Other Tucson-related varieties:

Guarjio Grain Amaranth C005
Yoeme Alvaaka Basil HB013
Patagonia Chile D059
Sinahuisa Chile D006
Magdalena Acelgas (chard) GR016
Magdalena Cilantro HB017
Purple Queen Garlic
O'odham Ke:li Ba:so Melon F005
I'toi Onion B001
Guarjio Panic Grass O001
Tohono O'odham "Sugarcane" Sorghum S002
Nichols Heirloom Tomato TM014
Tohono O'odham Yellow-Meated Watermelon G003