

2023 National Heirloom Expo Speakers | Santa Rosa Hall

Tuesday, September 12

10:00 – Zego Qi | Growing an Heirloom Seed Movement in China

Zego Qi is an avid heirloom gardener on a mission to cultivate appreciation for heirloom seeds in China. His talk will speak to the current state of the heirloom movement in China and why heirlooms are important to the future of agriculture and food security in China.

11:00 – Alice Doyle | New and Cool Plants from A to Z

Alice Doyle is the owner of Log House Plants in Oregon, and for nearly 50 years she has been finding, curating, and growing some of the most exciting and unusual edibles and ornamentals for nurseries in California and the Pacific Northwest. She will share some of her favorites!

Noon – Brijette Peña | Crowdsourcing Climate-Resilient Seeds for Southern California

Brijette Peña owns San Diego Seed Co., which produces organic, regionally adapted seeds for Southern California growers. She also facilitates participatory plant breeding, where growers and other stakeholders are an active part of making varieties more resilient. Brijette will talk about what participatory breeding means, and why it matters.

1:00 – Jon Jackson | Seeds Tell the Story: Heirlooms of the African Diaspora

Jon is a market farmer, former Army Ranger, explorer, and founder of Comfort Farms in Georgia. His presentation will explore the impact of forced migration from Africa to the Americas on the culture and cuisine of the Americas, and the importance of these drought-resistant, resilient varieties in an age of climate change.

2:00 – Bevin Cohen | Tomatoes: America's Favorite Fruit

Bevin is an author, herbalist, seed saver, and owner of [Small House Farm](#) in Michigan. He will share the exciting stories of how this South American fruit traveled around the world and influenced the cuisines and cultures where it spread. He will also offer tips on how to maximize your tomato harvest and demonstrate how to collect tomato seeds from your garden.

3:00 – Gibron Jones | The Power of Partnership: Farmers and Food Hubs Combating Diet-Related Illnesses

Gibron is the founder of HOSCO SHIFT and the North Sarah Food Hub in his home city of St. Louis. The nonprofit is focused on increasing access to healthy local food, and creating markets for farmers and jobs in communities that need them most. In his presentation, Gibron will talk the strategies they created to connect farmers with food hubs, and how he is working to replicate the model.

4:00 – Steven Murray | A Life of Exotic Fruit Around the World

Steven Murray runs [Murray Family Farms](#), an organic farm in Bakersfield, CA, where he grows about 700 species of more than 3,000 varieties of fruit. He has traveled to nearly 100 countries looking for rare and exotic fruits and participates in about 40 markets across southern California. He will talk about his work collecting and growing this amazing diversity of fruits.

5:00 – Ashlie Thomas | Holistic Approaches to Wellness: Gardening for Nutrition

Ashlie Thomas is an author and food security and home gardening advocate known on social media as The Mocha Gardener. In her talk, she will draw on her training in nutritional science and wellness, as well as her experiences as a small-scale homesteader in North Carolina and offer strategies for maximizing nutrition density and enjoyment in the garden.

6:00 – Sara Patterson | From Gardening in Chocolate Soil with my Family to Farming in Red Sand for my Community: My Story

Sara owns Red Acre Farm and is the co-founder of the Red Acre Center. When she was 10 years old, her family moved from the verdant San Fernando Valley to wind-swept southern Utah, at an elevation of 5,900 feet. She began growing food and at 14 started a CSA farm. Sara believes that no matter where you live, you need to know where your food comes from and to grow enough for yourself and your community.

7:00 – Perspectives on Seed Saving: Bevin Cohen, Stephen McComber, and Brijette Peña

Bevin, Brijette, and Stephen each bring a unique set of experiences and perspectives to the practice of seed saving and seed keeping. They will address the many aspects of seed saving – personal, social, cultural, and spiritual.

Wednesday, September 13

10:00 -- Richie Ramsay | Traditional and Subsistence Farming in Jamaica

Richie manages Baker Creek's trial growing operations in Jamaica. In his talk, Richie will offer perspective on traditional and subsistence growing practices and how they influence agriculture in Jamaica.

11:00 -- Makeda Dread Cheatom and Mariko Davis Gifford | Moringa: The Most Nutritious Plant on Earth

Makeda Cheatom is Executive Director and Founder of the WorldBeat Cultural Center in San Diego. For 30 years she has produced programs and presented artists from various cultural genres in the cultural center. Makeda has received numerous awards for her service to the community. She is also an avid gardener who advocates for the wider use of moringa, a drought-tolerant superfood found to have many benefits for soil as well.

Mariko Davis Gifford has been growing Moringa in San Diego, California, for 25 years. By co-creating with Moringa, she has learned many clever ways it can be grown, as well as the essential way to produce the highest quality Moringa possible. 10 years ago, she began teaching others her methods and now has students in more than 37 countries around the world, offering courses online.

Noon -- Larry Santoyo | Principles of Permaculture for the Home Garden

Larry Santoyo is Programs Director at [The Permaculture Academy](#) and Senior Planner at Earthflow Designs, a permaculture design & build firm based in Los Angeles. He will introduce permaculture principles and describe how they can be implemented in projects regardless of size.

1:00 -- Rachel Parent | Going Back to Our Roots: Combating the Lab Grown, Synthetic Food Revolution

Rachel Parent is a journalist and Founder of Kids' Right to Know, a non-profit organization based in Canada and focused on education and policy change regarding GMOs. She will explain the current happenings in our food system and what it means for people and the environment. She will also share how fixing the food system is possible through regenerative agriculture and activism.

2:00 -- Jeffrey Smith | The GMO 2.0: Addressing the Unprecedented Assault on our Food, Nature, and Future

Jeffrey is one of the leading activists promoting non-GMO choices, and he is an author and founder of The Institute for Responsible Technology. In his talk, Jeffrey will take on the unprecedented existential threats from GMO 2.0 and describe his organization is building a new movement to establish national laws and international treaties to protect human health, the environment, and future generations.

3:00: Multinational Exchange for Sustainable Agriculture | Finding Common Ground Between Farmers in the Global South and Global North

MESA Director Lauren Augusta and a distinguished panel of international partners will explore the opportunities and challenges facing sustainable agriculture and food systems globally.

4:00: Christy Wilhelmi | Growing Fruit in Small Spaces

Christy Wilhelmi is the founder of [Gardenerd](#), where she specializes in small-space, organic vegetable garden design, consulting, and teaching. In her talk, Christy will address topics including soil preparation, design strategies, combination planting, and growing in containers.

4:00 p.m. Special Workshop: Step into a Higher Version of Yourself and Make a Difference in the World | Jeffrey Smith, Rachel Parent, Indy Srinath

Location: San Nicholas Hall

Nationally known leaders Jeffrey Smith, Rachel Parent, and Indy Srinath collectively have decades of experience igniting movements, organizing communities, generating global media coverage, and driving positive change. Now they have come together to help you make a difference.

5:00 – John Kohler | Growing for Health

On his popular YouTube channel Growing Your Greens, John Kohler shares his boundless passion for gardening and healthy eating. Be prepared to come away inspired from his presentation.

6:00 – David Shields | The Ark of Taste: Delicious and Distinctive Foods That Define the United States

David Shields is known as “the flavor saver” in the South. He tracks down the classic food crops of the region and assists in restoring them to fields and tables. From heirloom tomatoes to Tupelo honey, David's talk will focus on the foods that embody our national culinary diversity and explain why championing them "promotes a more equitable alternative to industrial agriculture."

7:00 – Indy Srinath | Farm Dreams

Indy is a forager, educator, urban farmer, and steward of both her environment and her community. She is currently transforming a small plot of land in Los Angeles to create a mutual aid model demonstration farm. Her work is centered around the amplification of black and brown communities and food insecure regions. She is the host of NatGeo’s “Farm Dreams.” Instagram: @indyofficialis She will show clips from the series and talk about its impact.

Thursday, September 14

10:00 – Jeff and Sandy Bragg | Reclaiming the Potato as Health Food Jeff and Sandy Bragg are advocates for organic, heirloom potatoes that are a world apart from the Potato Industrial Complex ones you’ll find in the grocery store. They will address the diversity of potatoes available, the history of potatoes and potato farming, as well as potatoes’ many nutritional benefits.

11:00 – Ligia Parisi | Growing Heirloom Seeds in Chile: Our Story

Ligia Parisi and her husband, Raul, left their high-powered careers in Santiago for the solitude of a farm in the Andes. They describe themselves as “self-made agronomists,” and Ligia will share their experiences and lessons learned.

Noon – Dennis Sharmahd | A Lifetime of Rare Edible Plants

Dennis Sharmahd is an edible landscape artist, herbalist, and mycologist who has spent extensive time exploring in Mexico and Brazil for rare fruits, herbs, and mushrooms, many of which he propagates at his farm in Escondido. In his talk, Dennis will introduce the audience to his collection and talk about the importance of rare fruit collections such as the one he curates.

1:00 -- Helen Juarez | Engaging the Senses Through Agricultural Therapy

Helen Juarez is a founding member of the network of seed guardians of western Mexico, and organizes seed festivals, workshops, and seed exchanges. A professor at the University of Guadalajara, she is also part of a team of researchers focused on promoting sustainable agriculture in the South Coast region of Jalisco. She will reflect on the stories and impact of her work with incarcerated people and children with disabilities.

2:00 – Wendi Phan | Gardening in a Small Space

Los Angeles gardener Wendi Phan, of Gardens of Wendiland, knows how to get the most out of a small space for gardening. In this presentation, she will share her secrets.

3:00 – Stephen McComber | Seed Keeping and Planting by the Moon

As a traditional Haudenosaunee seed keeper, Stephen McComber has shared his knowledge with international audiences. He is also a renowned artist, proud grandfather, and works as a native elder for Corrections Canada. Stephen will share stories of his seed keeping work and collection, as well as describe the practice of planting by the moon.

4:00 – Steve Sprinkel | Farmer and Cook: Our Best Crop Has Been Organic People

Over their 23 years, Steve Sprinkel and Olivia Chase's Farmer and the Cook in Ojai has worked with over 3,000 employees, many of whom are still involved in food and agriculture. Steve says: "We have been able to impart to them the principles of organic food and farming and with their help grow a consumer community that's local and global." Steve will reflect on the stories and impact of nurturing this community.

5:00 – Joseph Lofthouse | How to Garden with Less Work and More Joy

Joseph Lofthouse has adopted the principles of landrace gardening in his high-altitude, short-season, desert garden. He encourages genetic diversity, cross pollination, and survival of the fittest, allowing the plants to adapt themselves to the current and ever-changing ecosystem, thus simplifying gardening and seed saving. He will share how you can adapt these ideas in your own garden.

6:00 – Evan Gregoire | Ancestral Seed Collections

Saving seeds from your ancestors preserves unique varieties that are in danger of being completely extinct. Having your ancestral genetics allows you to maintain biodiversity and continue cultural traditions that are truly special. This informative panel will explain how anyone can get started. Evan Gregoire is the founder of The Portland Seedhouse, which supports over 500 different plant varieties each year.

7:00 -- David Shields | The 10 Most Wanted Lost Fruits, Vegetables, and Grains in the U.S.

David Shields is known as "the flavor saver" in the South. He tracks down the classic food crops of the region and assists in restoring them to fields and tables. From heirloom tomatoes to Tupelo honey, David's talk will focus on the foods that embody our national culinary diversity and explain why championing them "promotes a more equitable alternative to industrial agriculture."