



Southern Exposure Seed Exchange Observational Trials, 2014

Irena Hollowell and Ken Bezilla
SESE Gardens, Mineral, VA

Jewels of Opar (*Talinum paniculatum*) impressed us with its beautiful panicles of tiny 3/8 inch pink flowers, and equally attractive seedheads in shades of orange, red, gold, brown, grey, and after frost, black. The succulent leaves also made a favorable impression on our palates. It can be hard to find mild salad greens that grow well in the heat of our summers, but Jewels of Opar is native to parts of the South and the Caribbean, and grew very well here throughout the summer. Though we planted only few rowfeet, we collected an abundant seed harvest, and even in our first summer growing it, we had a few self-sown plants come up in our garden. We are carrying it in our 2015 catalog.

We got *Spilanthes* from a Seed Savers Exchange member under the name Bredes Mafane. It sprawled, grew vigorously, and flowered abundantly. While some of us enjoyed its tingle, at least as many disliked it in the fresh state. If thoroughly cooked, it loses its tingle; however, after light cooking it still tingles. There was general consensus here that it would make a suitable ingredient in mouthwash. We did not collect seed in 2014. We have not decided whether to grow it again in 2015.

Cape gooseberry bore its first ripe fruit in September, and bore a few more ripe fruits before frost, though after the first few fruits ripened, later fruits didn't ripen properly (bug damage?). The taste was fruity and similar to ground cherries, but also a little different. In warmer areas or in hotter years, it might be a good choice, coming into season after ground cherry plants have died. I expect we will try it again next year.

Garden Huckleberry is not a relative of other huckleberries or of blueberries, but a relative of tomatoes, eggplants, and ground cherries. Our plants bore an abundant harvest of black berries. They turn black before they are ripe, and gradually become less shiny as they ripen further. Raw, their taste is not agreeable. Garden huckleberry jam, however, is

tasty and quite similar to other berry jams. We turned some of our berries into jam and extracted seed from others. While some jam makers recommend processing garden huckleberries with baking soda, but we found our jam tastier without it. After we run germination tests on the seed lots we harvested, it is likely that we will put it up on our webstore for sale.

Despite some shade, our African Groundnut plants grew to about 12 inches across and 6 inches high, and produced a fair yield of underground nuts. It remains to be seen if any of the nuts matured sufficiently to germinate in 2015.

We planted out 6 varieties of cosmos that we carry (Bright Lights Orange, Memories of Mona, Mona's Orange, Picotee, Sensation Mix, Sea Shells Mix) on 6/10 and collected info on maturity dates, flower size, plant size, and length of flowering. We collected similar data on marigolds that we carry (Frances's Choice, Lemon Drop, Naughty Marietta, Red Metamorph, Spanish Brocade, Tashkent #1), planted out in May, but due to some seedlings being started at different times, some maturity dates were affected, so we'll be repeating this trial for maturity dates another year. The cool summer meant that all marigold varieties flowered til frost -- in a normal hot summer, marigolds fade sometime in September, so we'll hope for hotter weather another year.

We planted out 14 varieties of southern peas 6/2. All of these are varieties we carry, except for Guarijo Frijol Gamuza and Yori Cahui, neither of which was interesting enough that we'll add them to our catalog. We collected data on maturity dates, pod sizes, plant sizes.

We planted out 9 varieties of asparagus beans 6/4 (Green Pod Red Seed, Chinese Red Noodle, Liana, Purple Podded, and Green Pod Red Seed -- all SESE varieties -- and Three-Foot-Plus, White Galaxy, Otan (Hawaiian family heirloom), and Thai #3. We collected data on maturity dates, pod sizes, plant size, though we never got around to trellising them, so the plants sprawled and we didn't get to see how they'd do on trellising. White Galaxy was the most interesting new variety -- early maturing and with unusual white-green pods.

West Indian Gherkins (unlike Mexican Sour Gherkins) did not take to our tomato cage trellises. The fruits were a pleasant snack when small, but as they approached full maturity they became too prickly to enjoy. After some fruits had reached full maturity, the plants put out rather few new young fruits.

We planted out 8 okra varieties 5/27 (Clemson Spineless, Oakreez, Louisiana 16" Long Pod, White Velvet, Heavy Hitter, Egyptian, Burgundy, and Stewart Zeebst. It was a cool summer, so the varieties matured a week or two later than usual, and yields were less than usual. Even though we'd planted into raised beds in case of cold wet weather, foliar diseases (fusarium wilt?) started appearing in August, which eventually spread to all the varieties. Louisiana 16" Long Pod resisted fusarium the longest. Burgundy was earliest maturing, but harvests petered out later on. Heavy Hitter was early and heavy yielding, but had a lot of foliar disease.

Cucumbers and Melons were heavily affected by downy mildew, reducing the amount of useful data we were able to collect. We collected good information on maturity dates and fruit size, which we used to update our catalog descriptions.

In our cucumber patch, we planted, on 5/3: Ashley, Richmond Green Apple, Straight Eights, Marketmore 80, Arkansas Little Leaf, Jaune Dickfleischige, and Homemade Pickles. On 5/20, we planted Beit Alpha, Hmong Red, Mirella, Chinese Yellow, Homemade Pickles, and Jaune Dickfleischige. Of the cucumber varieties we do not already carry, the most notable was the Beit Alpha, with good yields and no bitterness, though the thin skin did make the fruits more susceptible to insect damage. Next year we plan to do an informal trial of a few different Beit Alpha varieties.

In our melon patch, we planted, on 5/9: Petit Gris de Rennes, Green Fleshed Pineapple, Top Mark, Edisto, Charentais, Delice de la Table, Noir des Carmes, Ha'Ogen, Pride of Wisconsin, Boule d'Or, and Prescott Fond Blanc. In nearby rows, on 5/26, we planted: Valencia Winter Melon, Neisnunger, Bateekh Samarra, Green Fleshed Pineapple, Dosakai Indian Stew Melon, Mother Mary's Pie Melon, Schoon's Hard Shell, Gropp Pie Melon, and Tendral Verde Tardif. Noir des Carmes was the earliest producer, with some fruit ripening by 7/20. Boule d'Or and Neisnunger won our taste tests. Due to downy mildew, many melons from the second planting - and some from the first planting - never produced a ripe enough fruit to enter in any taste test. Dosakai Indian Stew melon did not double well as a fruit for fresh eating. Gropp Pie Melon Produced an enormous harvest of baseball-sized melons, bearing so abundantly that they grew sitting on top of each other near the base of each plant. Raw, and ripe, Gropp Pie Melon tasted sweet and pleasant, but not as flavorful as most other melons in our trial. Mother Mary's Pie Melon also yielded well, but not nearly as well as Gropp, and also did not taste as sweet. We have acquired enough Noir des Carmes seed to sell it, and we are carrying it in our 2015 catalog. We will put Boule d'Or and Gropp Pie Melon on the grow-out list that we will send to our seed growers for 2015 seed crops.

Our trial tomatoes included Ananas Noir, Negro Azteca, Azteca 10, Surrender's Indian Curry, Rose de Berne, Orange Banana Paste, Super Italian Paste, Mr. Fumarole Paste, Joe Pesch Paste. Ananas Noir had agreeable taste and appearance, but I found it unusually hard to tell visually when it was ripe; the color of ripe Ananas Noir varied and was generally quite similar to the colors of more common tomatoes as they begin to turn color. Ananas Noir's Septoria resistance was poor. Surrender's Indian Curry had poor Septoria resistance, and produced a smallish yield, with a flavor that I found a bit distinctive, but not radically so. Azteca 10 had red-orange medium-sized fruit with unimpressive flavor and medium-good septoria resistance. Rose de Berne had a flavor that I described as "complex, nicely balanced, rather mild, pleasant." Negro Azteca was quite sweet, even compared to other cherry tomatoes. Mr. Fumarole, though not as meaty as most paste types, had a distinctive, complex flavor with a hint of smokiness. Orange Banana Paste had a pleasant, fruity taste and good yields. Super Italian Paste had very good flavor for a paste tomato,

and a shape that seems likely to make for easier peeling, for those who blanch and peel tomatoes when making sauce.

Our trial peppers included Sweet Cayenne, Kandil Dolma, Fushimi Long Green, and Aji Margariteño. Sweet Cayenne was thinner, less prolific, and less flavorful than Jimmy Nardello's Italian, and otherwise similar - but without that competition it might well have gotten good reviews from us. Fushimi also did not particularly impress us in flavor or yield. Kandil Dolmas seemed more susceptible to disease than other peppers, with two of our four plants appearing sickly. Aji Margariteño bore its first ripe fruit very late, in mid-September, but was bearing well by the time frost hit in late October. It is a mild spice pepper, larger than the Capsicum chinense peppers that we already carry, and with thicker walls. We are unlikely to sell seeds for any of the peppers we trialled this year.

We planted 5 eggplant varieties for trials (Florida Market, Florida High Bush, Morden Midget, Rosita, Louisiana Long Green). The first 2 varieties have good reputations for setting flowers in hot weather, but for the second summer in a row here, cool summers kept us from collecting useful data. Morden Midget, a Canadian variety, outperformed all the other eggplants until September, when the other varieties finally caught up to it!

In our edamame plot, we grew Lanco, Moon Cake, Tankuro, Korean Black, and Shirofumi. In yield, taste, and length of harvest window, we found them similar. The main difference we noticed was in time of maturity. We direct-seeded on May 20th. Shirofumi was ready for its first harvest on about 7/23, Tankuro on 7/28, Lanco on 8/25, Moon Cake in early September, and Korean Black on 10/3.

Notes from our trials and observations made it into our 2015 catalog variety descriptions, but only some of these updated descriptions have been copied to our website as of this writing (okra and marigolds). We hope to do a more thorough update this winter. The PDF of our 2015 catalog on our website is currently the best place to get an electronic copy of these updated descriptions.