



## Heirloom Cultivars - 2009 Trials

by  
Grant Matheke

The 2009 season marked the second year of a three-year replicated trial comparing the yield of selected heirloom vegetable cultivars with modern hybrids. Some of the cultivars such as ‘Glory of Enkhuizen’ cabbage and the two ‘Vienna’ kohlrabi cultivars were grown in Alaska gardens as early as 1898, but others such as the winter squash do not show up in the Alaska historic records except at hot springs because they require plastic mulch to mature outdoors, something that was introduced to Alaska gardeners in the late 1960s. . With one exception, the heirloom cultivars performed as well as the hybrids in 2009. In that one case the heirloom winter squash, ‘Blue Hubbard’ had a significantly higher yield than the modern hybrid, ‘Heavenly Hubbard’.

We have grown many heirloom cultivars in our trials over the years but this new round of testing opened my eyes to several noteworthy cultivars that were new to me. One of my favorites is ‘January King’, a late season, semi-savoyed cabbage with blue green leaves colorfully blushed with purple. A new hybrid cultivar, ‘Deadon’, was specifically bred to resemble ‘January King’ but it did not perform better in terms of yield or appearance.

The Winter Squash ‘Blue Hubbard’ also caught my eye as a variety that is definitely worth trying in Interior gardens. It is attractive, productive and tasty with lots of bright orange “meat”. However fruit is very large,so it requires either a big family or a big freezer to do it justice.



*‘January King’ cabbage, photo courtesy of <http://mymogarden.files.wordpress.com>*



*‘Blue Hubbard’ squash, photo courtesy of [localnourishment.com](http://localnourishment.com)*

Boston Marrow is another heirloom winter squash that deserves a try in local gardens and it comes not only with my recommendation but with an interesting history.

“This lovely, mid-size winter squash has a custard-like, buttery flavor with almost 200 years of documented history, though possibly of prehistoric origin. It reaches maturity in 90 to 100 days and has striking, reddish orange skin and an average weight of 10 to 20 pounds, though it can be larger in optimal growing conditions. The



*‘Boston Marrow’ squash, photo courtesy of <http://3.bp.blogspot.com>*

squash originated in the upstate New York area and its legend as a Native American vegetable gifted to European-descended gardeners links it to traditional American history. The seeds were later passed on to Salem, Massachusetts in 1831, where the Boston (or “Autumnal”) Marrow Squash was then popularized by Mr. J. M. Ives. It is speculated to be originally of Chilean origin (linked to the Valparaiso squash or *C. mammeata*) but this is undocumented. It was primarily used in New England as a pie squash and is prized for its rich orange flesh with a fine texture. Its water content gives it a fresh mouthfeel, and it was described in 1858 as having a skin as thin as the inner envelope of an egg. Due to its success in cool and short-season growing regions and other easy-to-grow qualities, its production has spread throughout the United States, from Massachusetts to Washington

state and from California to Florida [and Alaska]. It is a good storage crop, for if kept in a cool and dry place it will last until the following spring.” [www.slowfoodusa.org](http://www.slowfoodusa.org)

The coming season will be the third and final trial for this group of heirloom vegetables, but we will definitely look back to our past for more open pollinated gems to see which cultivars stand the test of time and changing climate conditions.

Common Name	Type	Cultivar		kg/m	lb/ft	Origin
Bush Bean		Provider	Modern	1.12	0.75	1965
Bush Bean		Oregon 54	Modern	0.94	0.63	1989
Bush Bean		Bush Blue Lake	Heirloom	0.61	0.41	1962
Bush Bean		Black Valentine	Heirloom	0.44	0.30	1850's
Beet		Red Ace	Modern Hybrid	1.38	0.93	
Beet		Chioggia	Heirloom	1.16	0.78	1840's
Beet		Early Blood Turnip	Heirloom	1.86	1.25	1800's
Beet		Egyptian	Heirloom	1.27	0.85	1800's
Cabbage	Pointed	Arrowhead	Modern Hybrid	2.44	1.64	
Cabbage	Pointed	Early Jersey Wakefield	Heirloom	2.12	1.42	1840
Cabbage	Mid-season	Glory of Enkuizen	Heirloom	3.18	2.13	1800's
Cabbage	Mid-season	Tobia	Modern Hybrid	4.31	2.90	
Cabbage	Late	Deadon	Heirloom	2.51	1.69	
Cabbage	Late	January King	Modern Hybrid	2.52	1.69	pre-1885
Cucumber		Genuine	Modern Hybrid	8.30	5.58	
Cucumber		Straight Eight	Heirloom	7.72	5.19	1835
Cucumber		Long Green Improved	Heirloom	7.35	4.94	1870
Cucumber		Marketmore 76	Heirloom	5.25	3.53	
Kohlrabi		Early Purple Vienna	Heirloom	1.98	1.33	1840's
Kohlrabi		Early White Vienna	Heirloom	3.16	2.12	1840's
Kohlrabi		Kolibri	Modern Hybrid	1.90	1.28	
Kohlrabi		Winner	Modern Hybrid	3.46	2.32	
Leek		King Richard	Modern	6.69	4.50	
Leek		Killima	Modern hybrid	6.18	4.15	
Leek		Giant Musselburg	Heirloom	5.63	3.79	1834
Winter Squash	Hubbard	Blue Hubbard	Heirloom	21.70	14.58	1840's
Winter Squash	Hubbard	Heavenly Hubbard	Modern Hybrid	9.97	6.70	
Winter Squash	Marrow	Boston Marrow	Heirloom	8.72	5.86	pre-1841
Winter Squash	Marrow	Red October	Modern Hybrid	7.62	5.12	

Originally published in *Georgeson Botanical Garden Review* Vol. 19, No. 2, 2010

For more information from the Georgeson Botanical Garden and the School of Natural Resources and Extension visit:

The University of Alaska Fairbanks is an affirmative action equal opportunity employer and educational institution.

[www.uaf.edu/snras/gbg](http://www.uaf.edu/snras/gbg)  
[www.uaf.edu/snras](http://www.uaf.edu/snras)  
[www.snras.blogspot.com](http://www.snras.blogspot.com)



*Naturally Inspiring.*