

# Food For Thought

## Hybrids, Heirlooms And GMOs Explained

(NAPSA)—If the terms “hybrid,” “heirloom” and “GMO” have you stumped, you’re not alone. When it comes to buying seeds and plants, there’s a lot of confusion, even among seasoned gardeners. Here are a few facts that may help.

### Hybrids

First things first: Hybrids are not the same thing as genetically modified organisms (GMOs). Thanks to pollinators such as bees and butterflies moving pollen from plant to plant, hybrids occur naturally in nature. A hybrid is created when two different plant varieties of the same species are cross-pollinated.

In the same way that dog breeders can cross a Labrador retriever and a poodle to create a soft, fluffy Labradoodle, gardeners can select parent plants that display particular traits to produce offspring that offer improved yield, size, hardiness, color, shape and taste.

The process of selective breeding was pioneered by Gregor Mendel in the 19th century. When it was first used by horticulturists in the 20th century, it resulted in hybrid corn that produced higher yields. Since that point, breeders, researchers and inventive gardeners have been using the process of hybridization to produce fruits, vegetables and flowers with highly selective features. Seed producers such as W. Atlee Burpee & Co. used selective breeding to create iconic vegetables such as the “Big Boy” tomato, a hybrid that displayed such vigor and disease resistance that it shaped the modern era of tomato breeding.

“Hybrids grow well coast to coast with stable and reliable traits across a multitude of growing environments. The dependability of flavor and garden performance is what makes them garden staples throughout the good—and the bad—growing seasons,” said Chelsey Fields, a horticulturist at Burpee.

### Heirlooms

Unlike hybrid seeds that result from selective breeding, heirlooms are open-pollinated varieties prized for having characteristics



**The “Big Boy” tomato is a hybrid that displayed such vigor and disease resistance that it shaped the modern era of tomato breeding.**

that haven’t changed over 50 to 100 years. They’re often specific to a particular area and therefore not widely adaptable. Also, unlike hybrids, their flowers and fruits tend to be less vigorous, making them more susceptible to diseases and adverse conditions. Many heirloom seeds were once available commercially and have been saved from extinction by dedicated gardeners who save fresh seeds every year.

### Genetically Modified Organisms

GMOs are quite different from both hybrids and heirlooms. GMO seeds are the result of genetic engineering, the process of altering a plant’s DNA in a laboratory setting. This often includes introducing genes from a different species to increase a plant’s resistance to disease or spoilage. It’s important to know GMOs are found only in commercially grown farm produce. Seeds or plants that might contain GMOs are not available to home gardeners in the United States. All of Burpee’s hybrid and heirloom seeds are non-GMO. The company has supplied American home gardeners with the highest-quality seeds since 1876.

### Learn More

For further facts, gardening ideas and how-to videos on direct-sown seeds, visit [www.burpee.com](http://www.burpee.com) or call (800) 888-1447.