

‘Science not used is science wasted.’

Inspirations Seeds can send seeds all over the World from Tasmania which has a world renowned clean and green image.

In this Newsletter we are going to look at the work of my colleague and friend Bob Reid at The Cressy Research Station in Tasmania. Bob is highly regarded in plant research: some of his previous appointments include head researcher in grains crops for the FAO Rome headquarters where he travelled all over the World, Chief Scientific Officer in the Falkland Islands, and Chief Scientist with the CSIRO in Queensland Australia.



The plant material we are going to look at is of interest to all keen home gardeners and professional horticulturalists in all cool climates in the World. The following information is written by Bob, it is his personal experience and knowledge from collecting rare varieties of heritage beans.

Dear David

I was asked the other day by a home gardener in Victoria as to why I am so absorbed in growing legumes and pulses (peas, beans etc.) In responding to him I realised that I had never actually fully amalgamated my own interest (some would say obsession) with this fascinating group of plants. So here goes.

First it is the history of both the plant and myself. I first became seriously aware of legumes when I both trained as and later became a scientist with the CSIRO, division of tropical pastures in North Queensland. My principal focus was on forage plants but as I travelled the World collecting legume germ plasm I saw not only the huge array of food legumes but also became aware as to their importance to the human diet. As a boy growing up in Scotland beans meant “Heinz baked beans” mushy beans, I still love them, and the occasional butterbeans on the plate. Now I regularly consume humus(chickpeas) Mexican refried beans, various dahls, Indian stewed peas, hot chilli (bean) soups and many, many others.

Secondly being a type 2 diabetic I was very pleased to discover that they are one of the best foods to eat as not only do they control the condition but they can stop you getting it in the first place. Further studies in Japan have shown that black seeded plants have high levels of anthocyanin, and it has been demonstrated that this is linked to the prevention of cancers, hence my interest in finding more black seeded varieties.

Thirdly I reside in Tasmania (almost paradise). I became more interested in finding species, varieties, cultivars, that are adapted to maritime climates in essence a short growing season with relatively cool night temperatures, unless you live near the coast.

Over the years I have assembled an extensive collection of material, mainly from climates like our, Spain, Portugal, Chile or short summers Manchuria, high altitude Mexico. Not all have been grown out as yet but very year I grow out more adapted material, and also keep my hand in by breeding better varieties.

That is it in a nutshell, now I will describe just a few of these cultivars which will be flowing through the system.

Actophan.

Bush dry bean *Phaseolus vulgaris*. Originating from 2000m altitude in central Mexico, this cultivar grows very well in cool night temperatures. It has black seeds and is very popular in traditional Mexican cooking, if picked early it is a delicious green bean.

Canario

Bush dry bean *Phaseolus vulgaris*. Sometimes called myocoba or peruano but this buff yellow cultivar originates in the mountains of Chiapas in Southern Mexico. It has the reputation of being the most tasty dry bean throughout Mexico and supposedly very easy to digest. It grows into a small upright bush and is surprisingly drought tolerant.



Midnight Black

Bush dry bean *Phaseolus vulgaris*. An “improved type” originating from Central Mexico. It has upright growth with the pods held well off the ground, the small black seeds dry well in the pods. Great in any recipe that calls for black beans

Vermont cranberry

Bush dry bean *Phaseolus vulgaris*. Originating from the new England region of the USA this “Barlotti” type has been popular for nearly 250 years. It forms a low bush and flowers very early. It has a reputation of being one of the best beans to add to a stew or casserole.

Jacob’s cattle gasless

Bush dry bean *Phaseolus vulgaris*. This bean resulted from crossing Jacobs cattle bean with Mexican black turtle undertaken in Maine in the 1950s. It has an excellent flavour, and is reported to produce half the flatulence of regular Jacob’s cattle beans. It has a bush habit maturing early.

Roquefort

Green bean. *Phaseolus vulgaris*. A great little productive bush bean. It produces high straight yellow pods and will provide ample supplies over a long season. The pods are sweet and snap easily. Still one of the most popular beans grown in France.



Cascade Giant

Climbing bean *Phaseolus vulgaris*

Bred by Dr James Baggett in Oregon. It is a cross between Oregon giant and Oregon trail (a buff blue lake bean type) It is a vigorous climber and is arguably one of the best in a cool temperate climate. Very productive over a long period of time.

Cherokee trail of tears

Climbing bean *Phaseolus vulgaris*. Some American home gardeners consider this to be one of the finest flavoured of all green beans.. Noted in 1838 during the infamous eviction of the Cherokee Indians from the Appalachian mountains, it has obviously been selected over hundreds of years. Vigorous and easy to grow. The small black beans can also be stored and eaten like other dry beans.

Hoods White Tepary bean

Tepary bean *Phaseolus acutifolius*. From the deserts of Northern Mexico and Arizona. Tepary beans are arguably the most drought tolerant of all the beans. Indeed they are best planted in the driest part of the garden and only watered in clearly needed. Grow as a dry bean, they have a nutty flavour and once again have a place in gourmet cooking. They grow low on the ground and once the pods are mature and leathery and grey and the seeds have ripened pull the whole plant out of the ground and leave to dry for a few days. Seeds can be threshed out very easily.

Brown Tepary

Tepary bean *Phaseolus acutifolius*. As above but my own selection bred over ten years in Tasmania, for a very nutty flavour.

Well, that is just a taste of approximately 200 accessions. Arguably one of the largest living rare bean collections in the Southern and possibly now the Northern Hemisphere as well. It is our aim to get these varieties back into circulation, many of these accessions are being grown from some of the last few seeds available in the World that are true to type.

To be continued next month.



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