

CULTURAL CROP GUIDE

This guide features edible crops from the African, Asian, and Latin American diaspora. These crops are culturally meaningful for the immigrant communities that Vermont Garden Network (VGN) works with in Vermont.

Our first introduction to many of these crops was in 2020 when VGN began collaborating with New Farms for New Americans (NFNA). We are entering our sixth year serving as the educational partner and technical assistance support for gardeners who grow food crops in the NFNA community farm plots in Burlington. In the last few years we expanded our garden education programming to also include a partnership with the Janet S. Munt Family Room. We are entering our third year managing a collective garden where adults and children, many of whom are immigrants, share the responsibility and joy of cultivating familiar foods. The launch of our Greenhouse at Landry Park in 2025 has allowed us to further explore growing these crops from seed and to continue building relationships with Winooski immigrant communities.

With climate change, food sovereignty, and community access in mind, we are committed to expanding our seed saving work. In 2025, VGN piloted a community seed bank project in collaboration with NFNA to build up a reserve of culturally meaningful seeds, in large part motivated by two years of consecutive flooding in the Intervale (2023-24) and the devastating loss of many seeds. In addition to focusing on culturally meaningful crops, we have selected varieties that are: open-pollinated, adapted to a short season climate, early maturing, disease and/or pest resistant, and flood resilient. Many of the varieties featured in this Cultural Crop Guide are also plants we are saving seeds from. Not all of them produce mature seeds when grown in our plant hardiness zone 5, but for those that do, we have plans to continue seed saving and expanding access to culturally meaningful seeds.

VGN does not sell seeds, nor do we sell plants. Our focus is on education - learning about crops that our program participants would like to grow and sharing our gardening expertise to successfully garden in Vermont. Over the years we've done extensive research on many varieties included in the Cultural Crop Guide. We've learned from our hands-on experience growing these crops and above all, from many conversations shared in fields, gardens, and greenhouses with immigrant gardeners who intimately know these crops.

We hope this guide serves as a visual resource and conversation starter to learn more about traditional foodways and agricultural practices from a diverse gardening community in Vermont.

INTRODUCTION



Vermont Garden Network
www.vtgardens.org

Burlington, Vermont
March 2026

GREENS

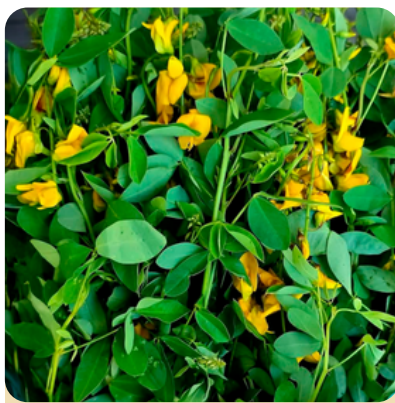


Amaranth

Amaranthus spp.

African leaf

Heat-loving, fast-growing, leafy green. Variety popular in Africa.



Greens

Crotalaria longirostrata

Chipilín

Bushy, leguminous plant with yellow flowers. Both leaf and flower are edible. Native to Central America.

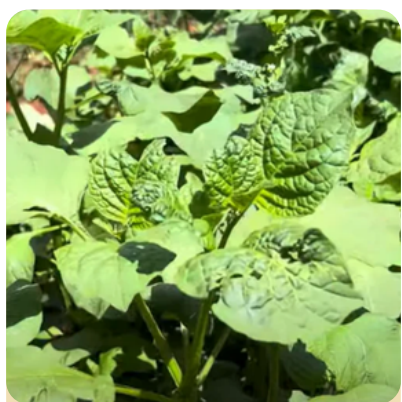


Greens

Chenopodium berlandieri

Huauzontle

Tall herbaceous annual with edible stems, leaves, buds and flowers. Native to Mexico.



Greens

Solanum scabrum

Mnavu

Leafy green vegetable in the nightshade family. Variety from Congo.



Greens

Solanum scabrum

Njama njama

Leafy green vegetable in the nightshade family. Variety from Cameroon.

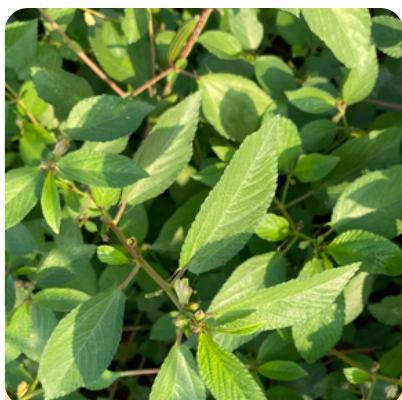


Greens

Porophyllum ruderale

Pápalo

Herbaceous leafy green that tastes like a mix of arugula, cilantro and rue. Commonly grown in Mexico.

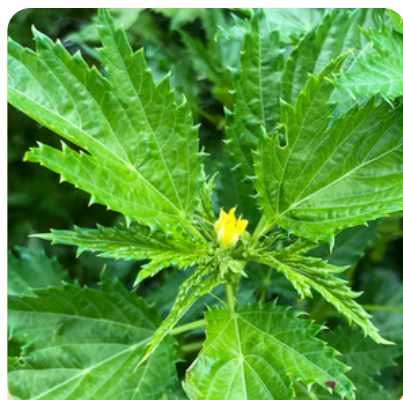


Molokhia

Corchorus olitorius

Palestinian

A warm season, heat-loving green that grows upright and tall.



Molokhia

Corchorus olitorius

Nigerian

A variety with shiny, dark green, palmate-shaped leaves.



Mustard

Brassica juncea

Big leaf

Large, wrinkled, wide leaves.

GREENS



Roselle

Hibiscus sabdariffa

Burma

Bushy plant with green palmate-shaped leaves and red stem. Grown for its edible leaves.



Spinach

Basella alba

Malabar Green

Fast growing vine with glossy, thick leaves resembling spinach. Green variety.



Spinach

Basella rubra

Malabar Red

Fast growing vine with glossy, thick leaves resembling spinach. Red stemmed variety.



Bean

Lablab purpureus

Green Hyacinth

Flat, green pods grow on a thick, erect stem. Plant is bushy with broad green leaves.



Bean

Vigna unguiculata ssp. sesquipedalis

Gita long

Tender, dark green pods averaging between 15-20" long.



Bean

Vigna unguiculata

Grey Speckled Palapye

Cowpea adapted for northern climates. Leaves and beans are edible. Bush variety.



Corn

Zea mays

Zapalote Chico

White corn kernels with pink lines. Oaxacan landrace, adapted to northern climates. Flint type.

CUCUMBER & SQUASH



Cucumber
Cucumis sativus

Gagon

Bhutanese variety that thrives in cool northern climates. Very large fruit. Skin turns brown when fully mature.



Cucumber
Cucumis sativus

Hmong

Large fruit with white to pale green skin when young, turning to cream color as it matures.



Cucumber
Cucumis sativus

Sikkim

Ripe fruit has rust colored skin. Similar to the Bhutanese Gagon variety, but smaller.



Squash
Cucurbita pepo
Palestinian Kusa

Pale green, tender, summer squash.



Squash
Cucurbita maxima
Sweet Meat

Large fruit with blueish-gray colored skin. Great storage squash. Dense flesh.



Squash
Cucurbita maxima
Zapallo de Tronco

Fruit is glossy, dark green, with tender skin. Flesh is smooth, dry, buttery.



Gourd

Benincasa hispida

Ash Gourd

Very large oblong fruits with waxy, powdery skin.

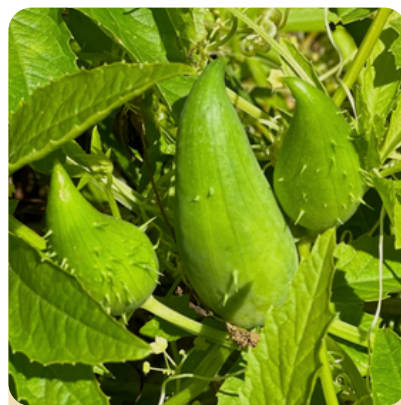


Gourd

Lagenaria siceraria

Bottle

Long, cylindrical, light green fruit. Vigorous climbing plant.

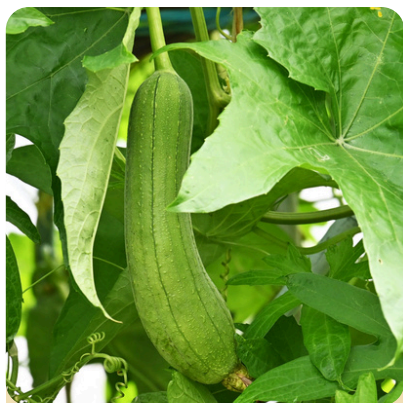


Gourd

Cyclanthera pedata

Caigua

Green, slipper-shaped fruits that have a flavor similar to cucumber. Climbing vine.



Gourd

Luffa cylindrica

Loofah

Smooth, slightly curved, green gourd. Vigorous vines can grow up to 30 feet.



Gourd

Trichosanthes cucumerina var. *angina*

Snake

Long, green and white striped fruit. Early ripening, produces over a long season.



Bittermelon

Momordica charantia

Futo Spindle

Medium-sized dark green fruit is heavily textured, almost spikey. Indian bittermelon type.



Bittermelon

Momordica charantia

Smooth

Medium-sized fruit is cylindrical with smooth, light green skin. Chinese bittermelon type.

EGGPLANT & TOMATO

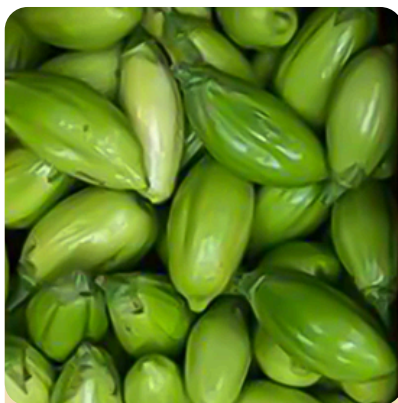


Eggplant

Solanum aethiopicum

African

Oblong, lobed, white garden egg. Adapted to shorter seasons. Plant grows 4-5' tall.



Eggplant

Solanum aethiopicum

Long Green Bitterball

Small, bitter, long-shaped eggplant. Typically eaten when green.



Eggplant

Solanum aethiopicum

Round Green

Round, green and white striped African eggplant. Fruits grow 4" in diameter.



Eggplant

Solanum aethiopicum var. *Gilo*

Green Pumpkin

Small, green, pumpkin-shaped eggplant.



Eggplant

Solanum melongena

Lao Green Stripe

Small, round eggplants with green and white streaked skin. Fruits grow up to 2" in diameter.



Tomatillo

Physalis ixocarpa

Purple Blush

Purple-blushed green fruit grows on a large bush. Fruits have a husk that turns from green to papery brown.



Tomato

Solanum lycopersicum

Zapotec ribbed

Large, red, deeply lobed tomato. Drought resistant. Heirloom variety from Mexico.



Uvilla

Physalis peruviana

Aguaymanto

Small, orange fruits grow in lantern-shaped husks.

HOT PEPPERS



Pepper

Capsicum baccatum

Aji Amarillo

Yellow/orange pepper often described as spicy & fruity.

Native to the Andes.



Pepper

Capsicum annuum

Alpine Poblano

Large, dark green variety that is especially adapted to colder climates.



Pepper

Capsicum annuum

Chilhuacle Negro

Dark chocolate brown pepper. Variety from Oaxaca, Mexico.



Pepper

Capsicum annuum var. *glabriusculum*

Chiltepin

Very small, bright red peppers. Native to the Southwest U.S. and parts of Mexico.



Pepper

Capsicum annuum

Dalle Khorsani

Peppers are small, round and turn red when ripe.



Pepper

Capsicum annuum

Korean Hong-Gochu

Slender peppers, bright red in color. Thin skin.



Pepper

Capsicum chinense

Magnum habanero

Bright orange fruits. This variety matures early in Vermont.



Pepper

Capsicum frutescens

Piri piri Mix

Pepper mix with various sized fruits. Peppers begin turn red when mature.



OKRA & RADISH



Okra

Amaranthus spp.

Burmese

Large pods are tender and spineless. Plants start yielding early and production lasts until frost.

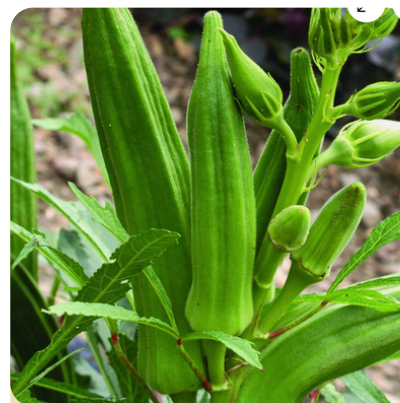


Okra

Abelmoschus esculentus

Cajun Jewel

Spineless plants yield early medium-sized, green pods.

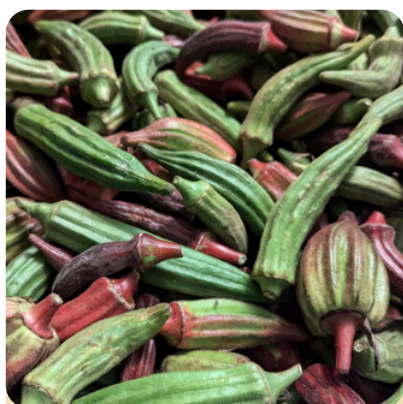


Okra

Abelmoschus esculentus

Clemson Spineless

One of the earliest producing green okra varieties.

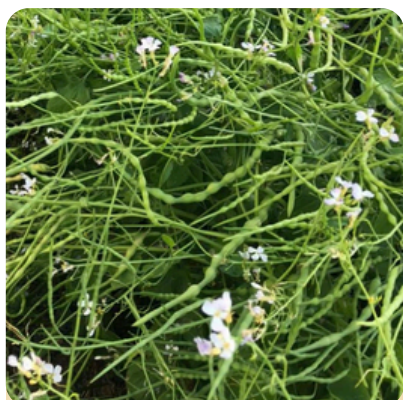


Okra

Abelmoschus esculentus

Ultracross

A cross-pollinated mix of 32+ varieties of okra with a range of pod shapes and colors.



Radish

Raphanus sativus, var. caudatus

Burma

Small, tender pods with a sweet and spicy flavor.



This material is based upon work supported by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture, through the Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program under subaward number CNE25-002.

FLOWERS & HERBS



Gomphrena
Gomphrena globosa
Purple Red

Flower with small, purple, globe-shaped bloom. Dries easily.



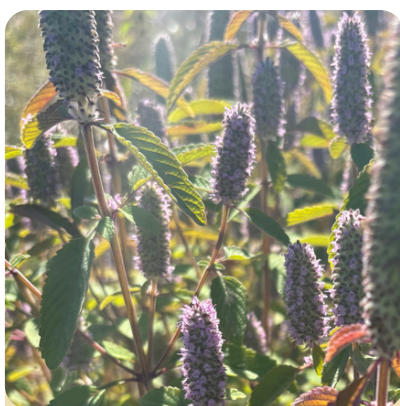
Marigold
Tagetes erecta
Orange

Flower with many large, bright orange petals.



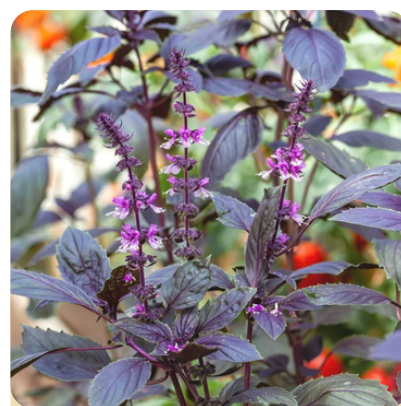
Basil
Ocimum basilicum
Thai

Small-leaved plant with purple stems and flowers. Strong licorice-anise flavor.



(Unidentified)
(Botanical name)
Burmese basil (?)

Looks similar to anise hyssop, but smells lemony, and has highly textured leaves.



Basil
Ocimum sanctum
Krishna

Deep purple and red leaved basil. Peppery scent with hints of cinnamon and clove.



Epazote
Dysphania ambrosioides
Mexican

Pungent aroma is often compared to oregano, anise, fennel, tarragon, mint.



Huacatay
Tagetes minuta
Huacatay

Tall, upright, marigold-type plant with yellow flowers. Leaves are used as an herb in South American cuisine.



Lemongrass
Cymbopogon citratus
Variety

Edible, tender herb with a citrus flavor. Grows as a tall, grassy mound.

These seed companies sell many culturally meaningful seeds featured in the Cultural Crop Guide:



We extend a special note of gratitude to our program partners with whom we've been growing culturally meaningful crops in fields, gardens, and greenhouses over the past six years:

