

Heirloom Blonde Cucumber Stands Out

A white heirloom cucumber from Livermore, Maine, has made an impression within one family for generations. Now, it's making a splash on a larger scale.

Boothby's Blonde is a strain of white cucumber that seems to bear a close relation to a 1920s variety known as Salad. Both cukes have black spines and turn a vibrant orange when overripe. The fruit looks similar to "lemon" cucumbers, though they tend to be longer and broader, and the color leans more yellow than in European white cucumbers.

Boothby's Blonde tastes best when picked smaller, around 6 to 8 in., making it ideal for eating whole or turning into gourmet pickles. According to the Slow Food Foundation for Diversity, Henry Boothby settled in Maine in 1720, and his family cultivated the cucumber in the generations that followed.

Fans of Boothby's Blonde say it has a pleasant flavor and crisp texture. That's partly due to the large seed cavity, which increases sweetness. The yellowish cream color of the fruit stands out against the warty skin and black spines that cover it. Still, they don't require peeling, making them ideal for snacking straight from the garden. They have a high water content and only become bitter when oversized, making them a versatile ingredient in many dishes.

They're small but productive, making them an easy choice for growing in small spaces. Expect the Boothby's Blonde to produce fruit within 55 days, putting it on the early end for cucumbers.

Seeds should be planted in full sun once the soil temperature has warmed. You can also start them indoors up to four weeks before the last frost. They grow best in fertile soil



Photo courtesy of Superseeds.com

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that's amended with compost. Keep the soil well-watered, and trellis the vines to allow for ample air circulation. Like all cucumbers, it can benefit from growing on black plastic to both suppress weeds and concentrate heat. Avoid harvesting bright yellow fruits and anything over 8 in., as they tend to be bitter.

Though Boothby's Blonde is increasing in popularity, it's still at risk of dying out in favor of more market-ready varieties. Purchase seeds from Seed Savers Exchange, Pinetree Garden Seeds, or other heirloom growers to continue their legacy.

Summer poinsettias aren't poinsettias at all; rather, they're an especially vibrant variety of Amaranthus, sometimes known as Joseph's Coat, thanks to a profusion of red, yellow and orange leaves.



Summer Poinsettias Add Color To Gardens

You'll have to forgive this festive plant for its confusing name. Summer poinsettias aren't poinsettias at all; rather, they're an especially vibrant variety of Amaranthus. Many know it as Joseph's Coat, thanks to a profusion of red, yellow and orange leaves that grow around the upper third of the plant near the crown. Its small, bristly flower clusters have a somewhat weedy appearance, which seems to keep amarantus out of formal gardens. Still, the plants are standouts in the right setting.

Summer poinsettias are one of roughly 70 types of amarantus found worldwide. Some varieties were a popular food source for Native Americans, who used the leaves like spinach and cooked the seed heads into porridge. This colorful variety hails from South America.

Amaranth seeds are tiny, so most gardeners start them indoors. Otherwise, you risk them rolling away. Sow the seeds indoors eight weeks before the last frost, and expect sprouts within 10 days. Amaranth can't handle cold and shouldn't go outside until the risk of frost has passed. After that, you can transplant them into a sheltered spot with partial to full sun, and water them well until they're established.

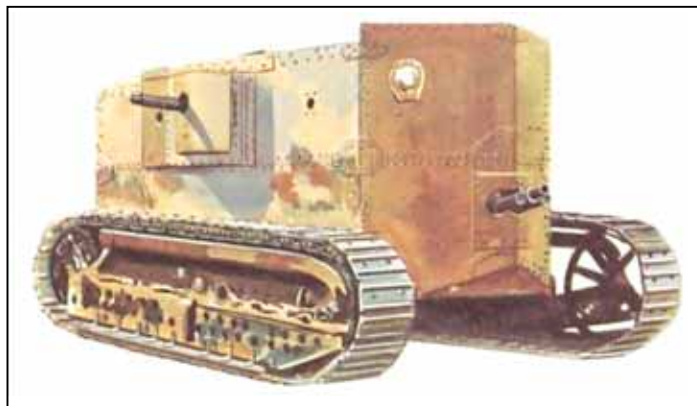
The small seeds need light for germination,

which has led to another nickname for amaranth—pigweed. Amaranth often came up in pig yards because the rooting animals brought the seeds to the surface. But despite this family legacy, summer poinsettias themselves aren't good at reseeding.

These vibrant plants thrive best when grouped together, often serving as a back border for flower beds. Maintain their impressive growth habit by spacing each plant at least 2 ft. apart. Although summer poinsettias can tolerate high temperatures, they require consistently moist soil, particularly in the initial stages. Mature plants are more capable of enduring droughts.

The plants top out at 4 ft. tall. Their stalks are weak and may require staking on the tallest plants. The leaves are green at the start of summer, but they'll turn vibrant shades of red, yellow and orange in the weeks that follow. Resist pruning, as you'll lose the colorful tops for the season.

As it's a fast-growing annual, you'll need to replace summer poinsettias yearly. That makes it a good option for the centerpiece of outdoor pots and containers. Just note that insects love their leaves, so you're likely to find lots of holes. But with the proper care, you'll enjoy their vibrant colors until frost.



Prototype 25-ton tracked weapon had just a 60-hp 4-cyl. gasoline engine powering two General Electric motors that drove each track.

Holt Tractor 'Tank' Didn't Work

During the tumultuous years of WWI, U.S. military officials were tasked with developing an armored vehicle to counter trench warfare. Shielded weaponry was necessary to combat the heavy artillery and machine guns that were taking a heavy human toll in the trenches. Modern-day "tanks" hadn't been invented yet, so engineers built a heavy metal cabinet around the engine and operator's platform of a tracked tractor made by Holt Manufacturing. Their prototype looked invincible, but field performance tests proved otherwise.

Installing a large cab made of 15 mm heavy-duty armor, along with a bulky forward-mounted cannon and two machine guns, created a brutish 25-ton tracked weapon. The designers and builders soon learned the prototype was immobile and underpowered. Not surprising, considering it had just a 60-hp 4-cyl. gasoline engine powering two General Electric motors that drove each track.

The tank crept along at just 6 mph on flat ground. When it encountered a slight incline, the engine sputtered, and the tank ground to a halt. Knowing the crew of six inside were sitting ducks, the engineers redesigned it with a stronger engine and a much lighter electric-powered cannon. It was a workable model, but the rig wasn't put into production because a truce between the warring countries ended the war.

The pseudo tank did make a very public appearance during the closing scenes of a miniseries produced by William Randolph Hearst in 1917. U.S. troops marched ahead of the twin-turreted tractor tank. It appeared far more menacing than functional.

Although the tractor-to-tank conversion wasn't successful, the effort did lay the groundwork for modern-day armaments, including the M1 Abrams, a 68-ton battle tank powered by a 1,500-hp engine.

A2 Milk May Be Easier To Digest

Milk cartons with A2 on them are becoming more common, even prominent, on store shelves. Entire dairies are selecting replacement stock that can produce A2 milk. So, what is A2 and why should you care?

Consumers are increasingly showing a preference for A2 milk based on reports that it causes fewer digestion problems. This is particularly important for individuals with lactose intolerance, who are unable to fully digest the sugar (lactose) in milk. They can have diarrhea, gas and bloating after eating or drinking dairy products.

According to Brad Heins, assistant professor and extension specialist at the University of Minnesota, it's all about the proteins. He was recently quoted in an article in Hoard's Dairyman on the subject. He explained that fluid milk proteins are mainly beta-casein and whey. Beta-casein takes several forms, commonly either A1 or A2.

Cows produce milk with either A1, A2 or both proteins. Both A1 and A2 proteins consist of a chain of 209 amino acids, the building blocks of protein. However, one of the amino acids in the chain differs. A1 milk has a histidine amino acid in the 67th position, and A2 milk has a proline amino acid there.

When A1 milk is digested or made into cheese, it creates the peptide BCM-7. The proline amino acid in A2 milk doesn't.

While the science is clear to this point, researchers have not been able to prove that the difference matters. According to an article in the April 2020 Journal of Food Engineering and Technology, BCM-7 has been found to have some minor effects on the gut movements and inflammation of animals, but not conclusively in humans.

However, many consumers of A2 milk report that it's more digestible. To attract those consumers, the dairy industry markets milk containing just A2 protein separately from standard fluid milk. Their ability to do so has been aided by genetic selection.



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Genomic testing can identify which protein the cows will produce. Bulls that sire calves that'll produce A2 protein can also be selected.

Certain breeds like Guernsey and Jersey are also more prone to producing A2 milk. However, the industry is rapidly moving to the selection of A2 production, regardless of breed.

Heins noted that artificial insemination studs (companies) increasingly offer only A2 bulls. He suggested that it's hard to find a bull that isn't A2. As a result, it'll likely be just a matter of years before all milk is A2.

Again, does it matter? The only way to know is to try the two different types for yourself...while there still are two different types.