

GUIDING VALUES

THE JEWISH SEED PROJECT
a project of JEWISH FARMER NETWORK

At the Jewish Seed Project, we recognize that—just as we keep seeds—they, too, keep us. Seeds grow with us, care for us, and sustain us with nourishment, stories, memories, and beauty. We approach the seeds with intention and a desire to share in their sustained life. In keeping seeds, we honor their history, passed down *I'dor vador*, from generation to generation, and connect to those who have kept seeds before us. As future ancestors, we lovingly imagine what these seeds might bring to our descendants by observing and learning from what the seeds share with us today. We are growing for future generations while enjoying the fruits of the present and seeking to understand the past.

CHOOSING SEEDS

We collectively select seeds that have connections to Jewish histories, communities, stories, spiritual practices, and the lands that have held us. These seeds have relationships with ancient Jewish texts, contemporary writings, recent memories, and are connected to the expansive historical context of Jewish peoplehood and relationship to land.

The seed stories we encounter may bring us to investigate varieties known and unknown, named and unnamed. In the case that we don't have access to a particular seed or know the exact variety, we will select the seed variety that is both most accessible and that most closely aligns with the descriptions found in our sources. In seed selection, we may factor in physical plant traits, geography, ecology, personal stories and relationships. We are committed to building intentional relationships with the seeds and the memories they hold.

DISTRIBUTING SEEDS

We distribute seeds to Jewish and allied growers who can nurture, regenerate, and co-create stories with these seeds, plants, and fruits. We select growers by first sharing within our networks via Jewish Farmer Network and seed keeping listservs, and more often with those in our community who express interest in seed keeping. We use questionnaires and one on one conversations to learn more about people's interest and their capacity to care for these seeds.

Participating research growers for the Jewish Seed Project trials are stewards who learn from the experience, build a relationships with the seeds, and share back both seeds and stories. Instead of treating seeds as a commodity or intellectual property, we cultivate a reciprocity-based relationship through which we honor them as life-giving beings. At this moment, we are distributing seeds directly to research growers for the purpose of our trials and to all interested parties via the Experimental Farm Network catalogue.

CARING FOR THE SEEDS AND PLANTS

Our research growers use different growing practices to experiment and learn from the plants while looking for specific traits to pass on to the next seed generation. At times we plant them at an appropriate distance from other plants to ensure isolation. At other times we intentionally plant them near each other to encourage cross pollination and create new hybrids.

Just as we care for the seeds and the plants they grow into, we care for the environment in which they grow. We encourage soil care for the sake of both biodiversity within the agroecological system and health within the water systems. We cultivate reciprocity with these plants through exchanges of oxygen and carbon dioxide, and through stories and song. In these ways, we keep these seeds and they keep us too.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER STEWARDS

We feel lucky to have access to the necessary resources to do this work, including land, seed keeping knowledge, networks of support, and state-sponsored seed banks. We are committed to actively engaging with and examining our responsibility towards these seeds, their stories, and their past, present, and future stewards. **We do not claim ownership or exclusive access to these seeds and understand that we are just one of many groups who have spiritually, historically, culturally, and geographically significant relationships with them.** As such, in an effort to expand access to these seeds and to honor them in their entirety, we aspire to share them with others who are connected to them.

STORY OF THE SEEDS

As Jews, we come from a rich tradition of storytelling. At our holiday dinner tables, through our sacred texts, and in our everyday lives, we revisit and reimagine the stories passed down to us through generations year after year. We tell these stories to understand our past, ground ourselves to our present, and cultivate a legacy for the future.

As a people of the land, Jewish stories are often rooted in the land itself. However—through exile, diaspora, landlessness, and assimilation—for many, our relationship with the land has been fractured. Many have forgotten our origins as a land-based people. Stories are an act of repair. When we tell stories about the land, we are remembering and repairing our relationship with it. When we tell stories about seeds, we are remembering and repairing our relationship with seeds .

Like us, these seeds have stories that brought them to, and which will bring them forward, from this moment. We honor the stories held by seeds— stories from when they were tended by our ancestors, other peoples, animals, and themselves. We dig deep to learn and share about each seed's past and how it intersects with our histories. We hope that in connecting with seeds, we will connect with new parts of ourselves.