



This is a magazine title page I created using Photoshop and InDesign.

“It isn’t nostalgia that makes  
heirlooms taste better.”

*It’s Chemistry.*”

Word of mouth is always a great advertisement. I first ventured into heirloom tomatoes after hearing for the umpteenth time how swell ‘Brandywine’ was. If gardeners from New Jersey to California were extolling its virtues, it must be worth growing. And it was. Since that first ‘Brandywine’, I’ve grown ‘Pezomancer’, ‘Old Flame’, Georgia Streak, and ‘German’, among others. And while I’d rather fight than give up my favorite hybrid, heirlooms now make up the lion’s share of my tomato crop.

Most of us cut our gardener’s teeth on hybrid tomatoes, those with names like ‘Jet Star’ or ‘Better Boy’ or ‘Ultra Girl’. With few exceptions, our chosen varieties were red, round, and—for the most part—the bigger, the better. There’s always been another side to the tomato world, though, a side where the fruits of the vine can be flat, scalloped, flattened, lobed, or shaped like hearts or strawberries. When ripe they might be white, pink, red, orange, yellow, gold, purple, chocolate-brown, blackish-red, green, or striped. In addition to the typical tomato foliage, there are potato-leaf types, waxy fern-like leaves, and puckered rugose leaves. And the flavors range from sweet to tart, mild to strong, perfumed and fruity to dark and smoky. Part of an heirloom’s charm is its history, which is often as colorful as its skin. What homeowner can resist ‘Radiator Charlie’s Mortgage Lifter’? This gigantic tomato was developed in the 1930s by Charlie Byles, who kept a radiator repair shop in West Virginia. Byles repeatedly crossed four of the biggest tomatoes he could find. When he had a stable variety, he sold transplants for a

dollar apiece and in six years paid off his mortgage. Or take ‘Cherokee Purple’, which dates to before 1890. About 10 years ago, Craig Leffoullier, a North Carolina chemist, got a letter and some tomato seeds from a stranger, J.D. Greene of Sevierville, Tennessee. This “purple” tomato had been in a neighbor’s family for years. Greene knew of Leffoullier’s interest in heirlooms and thought these seeds worth trying. Most so-called purple tomatoes are actually pink, so Leffoullier was delighted to discover this one was truly purple, and delicious at that.

If you like choices, you’ll love heirlooms. Ask anybody who pledges allegiance to heirloom tomatoes the question “Why?” and chances are you’ll get the same response: flavor. Heirlooms generally have more flavor than hybrids. And when you find the ones you really love, you’ll be able to taste them in your dreams.



PHOTOGRAPH BY David Cavagnaro

Dorell Merrill of Tulsa, Oklahoma, got into heirlooms when he was looking for tomatoes that tasted like the ones his parents grew. He describes ‘Brandywine’ as having the old-time taste he was seeking: a perfect blend of sweet and acid. The first time he tasted ‘Cherokee Purple’, “The flavor just exploded in my mouth. I held it up and did a 360 jig right there in the row.” Merrill grew up on hybrids these years ago. “Why waste time on them when there are so many interesting heirlooms to grow?” It isn’t nostalgia that makes heirlooms taste better. It’s chemistry. Most are indeterminate, meaning they keep putting on new growth until they die. The more foliage a plant has in relation to fruit, the better the flavor, because leaves manufacture the sugars and acids that end up in the fruit. An abundance of leaves means an abundance of sugars and acids.

So many varieties, so little room. There are 3,000 open-pollinated tomato varieties listed in the Seed Savers Exchange yearbook.

#### Older isn’t always better

Just because a tomato has been around longer than you have doesn’t guarantee it’s going to taste great. There are duels among heirlooms, and part of that may be due to location. Heirlooms, after all, are regional, even local, varieties. A tomato cultivated for generations in eastern Pennsylvania isn’t necessarily going to do well or taste great along the Texas coast.

If you haven’t tasted a lot of heirlooms yet, ask around. I’ve met some lovely tomatoes based on recommendations. But don’t believe everything you hear or read. ‘Costoluto Genovese’, which I

bought based on catalog copy, is one heirloom whose charms totally elude me. In my garden, this variety’s squat, convoluted red fruits were mealy and tasteless. One fellow ‘Costoluto’ grower suggested the fruits need to be harvested before they become fully ripe, but I didn’t find it helped much.



Heirloom tomatoes have characteristics some people might consider disadvantages. The fruits are generally thinner skinned and softer than those of hybrids, so they’re more liable to crack or bruise. That makes sense, since heirlooms were selected for home gardens rather than for commercial production.

Also, the many indeterminate varieties need lots of staking and tying. The exuberant growth could overwhelm the unsuspecting gardener. Jeff Dawson, an heirloom grower in Sebastopol, California, prunes indeterminate tomatoes like a hedge, topping slicing varieties at 5 ft. and cherry types at 6 ft. This practice

reduces weight and allows more sun in to ripen the season’s last fruits, but it’s also bound to sacrifice some flavor along with all those leaves.

Many heirlooms don’t yield as well as hybrids, but that’s partly why they have better flavor, since lower-yielding plants have more leaves per fruit. Certain large-fruited, potato-leaf varieties, like the legendary pink-fruited ‘Brandywine’, tend to have imperfect flowers, and so don’t self-pollinate as readily as other tomatoes. Gently flicking your fingers on the flowers should get the pollen where it needs to be. Or try plucking a freshly opened blossom and dabbing it onto other flowers. On the other hand, some heirlooms are very productive. For home gardeners who are growing for eating trials, yield probably isn’t a big issue. They’ll gladly sacrifice quantity for taste.

#### Save your owl seed

The key to getting really great heirlooms adapted to your growing conditions is saving your own seed. Jeff Dawson says at least 30% of the heirlooms he’s grown have improved with acclimatization. If a variety still doesn’t wow him after three years, he gives up on it. At the very least, Dawson says, grow one generation of seed you’ve saved yourself.

Others agree. Doreen Howard, who gardens on the hot, sticky Texas Gulf Coast, sees multiple advantages with home-saved seed. One is more tolerance to early blight, the biggest disease problem in her area. Earlier and earlier fruit set is another plus.

In a small garden, where there may not be room to separate varieties by several feet, you can guarantee self-pollination

by loosely tying squares of row cover material around a cluster of flowers. Small paper bags work well, too. Be sure to put the protection on before the flowers have fully developed and opened, and take it off once they’ve dropped. Carolyn Mala, the doyenne of heirloom tomato experts, cautions against growing the trendy, tiny-fruited currant tomatoes if you plan to save seed because they cross-pollinate easily with other tomatoes.

#### Heirloom Tomato Salsa

##### Ingredients

2 pounds heirloom tomatoes all the same color, seeded and cored  
2 cloves garlic, chopped  
1 red onion, chopped  
2 jalapeños, split and seeded  
1 cup cilantro leaves  
1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil  
Salt and pepper

##### Directions

Place tomatoes, garlic, red onion, jalapeños, 1/2 cup of cilantro, and 1/4 cup of the oil into a food processor. Pulse until the consistency of the mixture is coarse, about 5 (1-second) pulses. Transfer to a serving bowl and season with salt and pepper. Garnish the salsa with the remaining cilantro and oil.

This is the two-page spread that accompanies the title page in the previous frame. This piece was also created using Photoshop and InDesign.

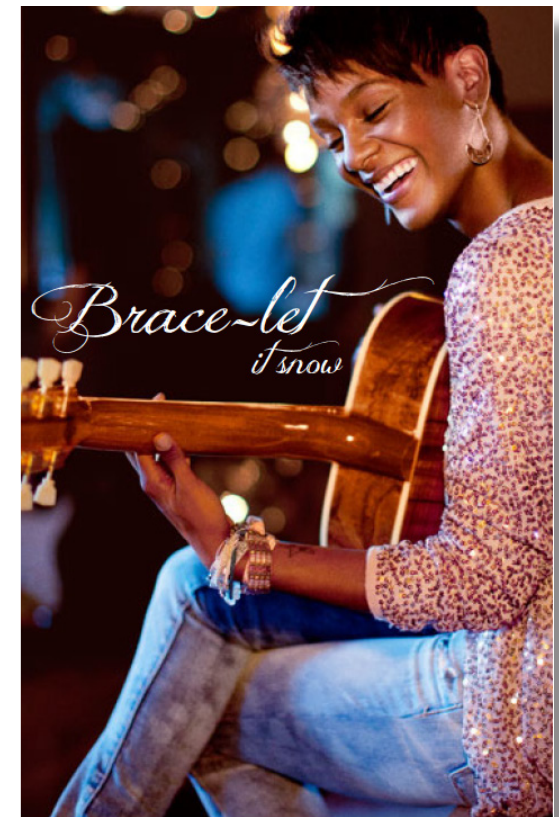


a. **Collage Watch**  
By Elements. Lobster claw. Resin, acrylic, glass, metal, tiger's eye, mother-of-pearl. 10" L, 1" W. Imported.  
Style #: 26726687 \$65

b. **Sultana Studded Bracelet**  
18kt gold plated metal, glass beads. 3" L, 1" W. Imported.  
Style #: 26220690 \$45

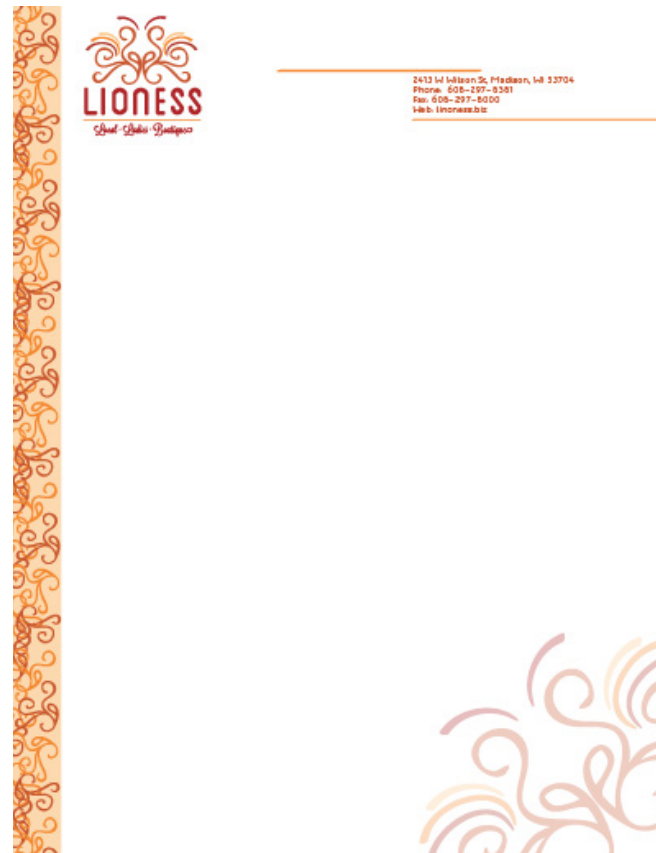
c. **Gem leaf Bracelet**  
Toggle closure. Acrylic, glass, metal. 7.5" L, 1" W. Imported.  
Style #: 26357681 \$25

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This is the cover and title page I created as a holiday catalog for the store, Anthropologie. This piece was created using Photoshop, Illustrator and InDesign.





These pieces were created for a fictional women's clothing company called Lioness. I created the logo using Illustrator and then used InDesign to create a letterhead and business card.