



All photos by Michael S. Contratto

Interview with a Bean Lover

Keith Crotz, Seed Savers Board Member • Chillicothe, Illinois

Beautiful colors ... beautiful shapes ... you just can't help but grab a handful and fondle their smooth shapes, sizes, and colors—cream and sand, the pitch-black shade of night, or a rose and purple tinge. Some beans are variegated and mottled in burgundy and brown, displaying designs of Appaloosa ponies or of tiny soldiers at attention. With names like Cherokee Trail of Tears and Anasazi, these beans commemorate Native American history. The names are as intriguing as their colors and shapes.

That is what caught the attention of Keith Crotz's father when he moved to a family farm in the late 1980s. He got a kick out of trying all the bean varieties and planted as many as 25 different kinds in one year. Sometimes he started with as few as three seeds or harvested as much as 80 pounds of one variety.

Keith and his wife live on a 100-year-old farm (a centennial farm), where they continue to grow a number of heirloom, nonhybrid, open-pollinated beans. Some of their favorites are Christmas Lima, Vermont Cranberry, Jacob's Cattle, Calypso, Lina Cisco's Bird Egg, and Tiger Eye. The farm became organic in 1995. When asked why the family chooses to use organic practices, Keith simply says, "Takes the questions out of nutrition." Organic farming involves rotation of plots. He uses 4-by-120-foot beds. It also involves lots of weeding with a wheel hoe, hand-picking insects, mulching, using hydrated lime and diatomaceous earth ... and more weeding ... and more weeding.

Beans are an efficient crop. Keith says he can do four plantings and have four harvests of fresh beans in the Illinois growing season. He also can plant, mulch, and forget the dry crop until they are ready to pick.

"[Organic] takes the questions out of nutrition."

—Keith Crotz

Keith shares fresh and dried beans with friends and people at work, and he sells dry beans for seed to Seed Savers Exchange for their seed catalog. He plants about an acre of beans with a broad range of textures and flavors.

Keith's favorite soup is made with stock and more than ten kinds of beans and every kind of vegetable from the garden. Easy, nutritious and delicious—that's beans for you!

- A *Calypso*
- B *Christmas Lima*
- C *Golden Lima*
- D *Lina Cisco's Bird Egg*
- E *Painted Pony*
- F *Peregion*
- G *Red Cranberry*
- H *Tanya's Pink Podded*

Bean Words

From Culinary Arts

Cassoulet— The name for a one-pot meal with a base usually consisting of white beans. It is popular in southwestern France and is named after the dish it is cooked in—a *cassole*.

From Health and Ecology

Amino acids— The chemical units used to build protein in the body

Phytoestrogen— Plant-based dietary chemicals that are similar to and valuable in balancing hormones in the female body

