



CREATING AND DEVELOPING THE SETO FARM GARDEN AT THE ESTONIAN OPEN AIR MUSEUM

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1. Introduction

The Estonian Open Air Museum, established in 1957, is located in the capital of Estonia, Tallinn. It holds a good collection of rural architecture. Farm buildings from different times and different areas of Estonia as well as public buildings (mills, a chapel, a schoolhouse, a village shop, etc.) are displayed here on 70 hectares. Each farm or a single dwelling has an authentic garden with vegetables, fruit trees, and ornamental plants. There are about 80 historical buildings and, together with corresponding gardens, they represent rural life from the 19th century to the present day.

The Estonian Open Air Museum started to work with heritage plants more than ten years ago and has developed some basic principles to be applied in this field. First of all, we search for



Fig. 1. View of the Estonian Open Air Museum. Photo by T. Tuul.



Fig. 2. Investigating plants in a home garden during a field trip. Allase farm, Litvina village, Seto region. Photo by M. Tamjärv.

old varieties. We prefer not to buy plants and seeds from garden centres, but rather get them from people who still grow them in their gardens. We have organised field trips and visits to gardens, carried out interviews with gardeners, and collected plants and seeds.

We also document all collected plants and write down as much information about a particular plant as we can get from an informant. This way a plant gets its history and starts telling its own story.

After being brought to the museum a plant becomes an exhibit and an essential part of the exposition. As museums teach people to appreciate cultural heritage, they also serve as ideal places for cultivating heritage plants. Together with farm buildings, historical garden tools, agricultural machinery, and kitchen utensils, plants cultivated and used in old days can be exhibited as well. Heritage plants naturally belong to the environment displayed at the open-air museum; they complement and enliven the museum exposition.

Heritage plants are cultivated varieties that have been grown in a certain location for a long time; they are adapted to different conditions and in this way create a rich genetic diversity. This diversity is significant for future sustainability and food security. Heritage cultivars are not suitable for industrial agriculture and, therefore, nowadays they are often not grown in gardens and farms anymore. Seeds of some heritage cultivars are preserved in gene banks, but many of them are forgotten and even extinct. By growing heritage plants in museums, we help to preserve them for future generations. Preserving perennials is easy, as they live for many years. Yet, to preserve annuals and biennials, we need to constantly grow and collect their seeds. Thus, seed saving knowledge is essential for preserving heirloom garden plants.

2. Seto farm garden

The Setos are an indigenous ethnic group in Southeast Estonia with a distinctive culture and way of living. Their life has been strongly influenced by the Russian culture due to the region's location next to the Russian border. Farm buildings brought to the museum from the Seto region were built at the turn of the 19th-20th century. The Seto farmstead was



Fig. 3. Erecting buildings of the Seto farm at the Estonian Open Air Museum in 2014. Photo by A. Banner.

opened to visitors in 2015 and it represents the time from the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 1960s. Along with erecting the farm at the museum, an investigation of the Seto gardening traditions and heritage garden plants was carried out.

2.1. History of gardening in the Seto region

In studying the gardening traditions in the Seto region, different sources were used which included both published materials (monographs, articles, print journalism) and archival data. In addition, several interviews were carried out and analysed, several gardens were visited and documented. The collected data and materials are preserved at the Estonian Open Air Museum.

For the Setos, vegetable growing is a long tradition and a garden has been a necessity of life. As farmland plots were small and often not fertile in this region, traditional grain growing and stock raising were more complicated. To feed their families, the Seto farmers had to find additional occupations. Men often earned their living outside the farm, while women stayed home and took up gardening, as little land was needed for growing vegetables. The entire plot was turned into beds and furrows. Garden crops were eaten by the growers themselves but they were also sold to earn additional income. Over time, this region developed its characteristic selling items. The Seto gardeners were (and still are) especially famous for their fresh and pickled cucumbers as well as onions and strawberries.

Sometimes the vegetable garden and the orchard were separated whereas sometimes they were combined, yet they were always enclosed by a fence. In the first half of the 20th century, the Setos cultivated plenty of white cabbages, onions, cucumbers, and radishes in their gardens, as well as beetroots, swedes, turnips, carrots, pumpkins, peas, and broad beans. There were usually a few apple trees in the orchard and often pear and cherry trees were grown there as well. Garden berries were of no particular importance in the Seto region – usually, there were one or two black currant bushes in the garden, as their leaves were essential for pickling cucumbers. Starting from the 1930s, growing strawberries became profitable. Compared to the rest of Estonia the growing season starts about two weeks earlier in the Seto region, as it is situated in the southern part of the country. For this

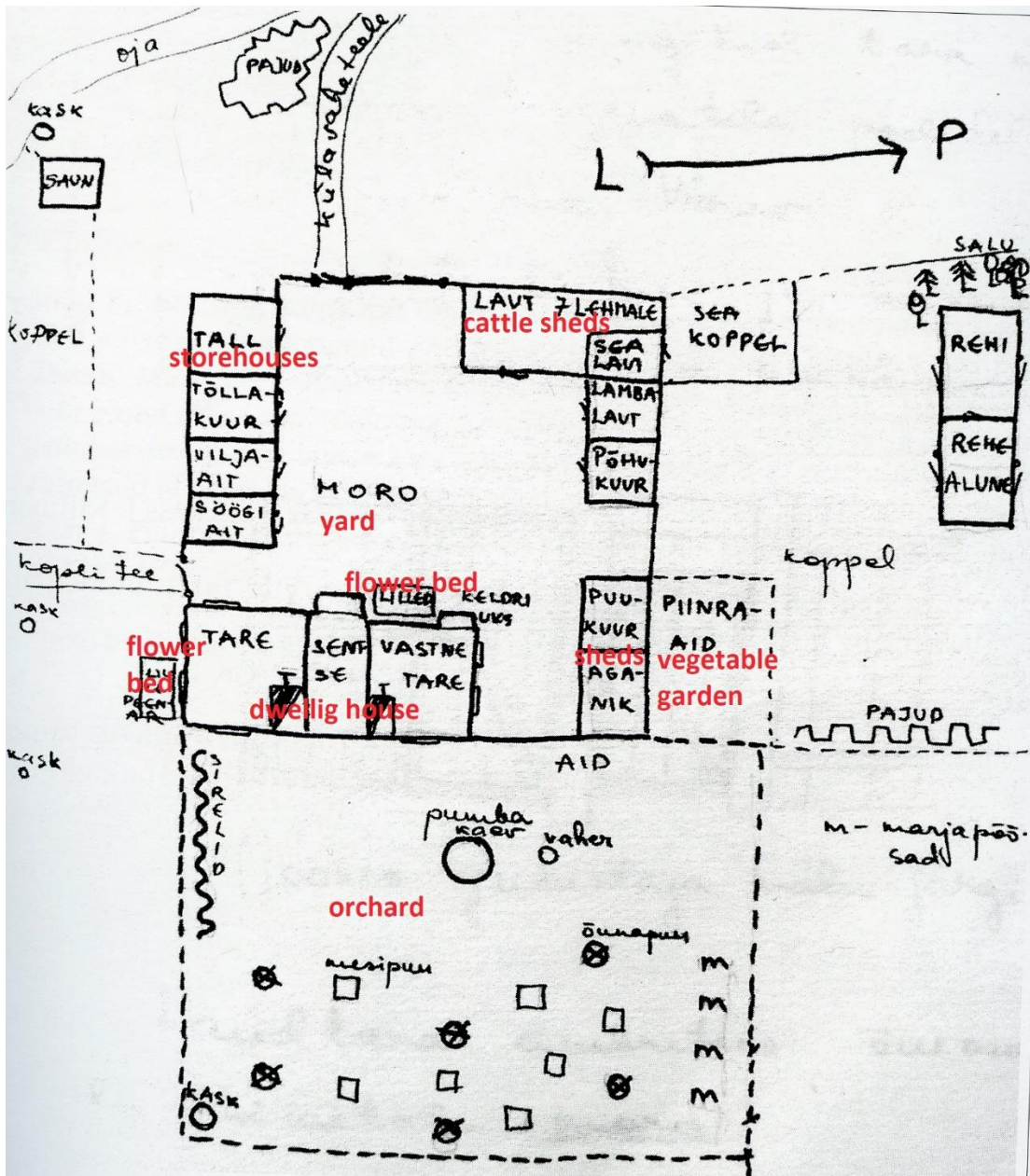


Fig. 4. Yard plan of Vaariku farmstead in the Seto region, dating from about 1917. Archive of the Estonian National Museum.

reason, strawberries ripen there earlier and give the advantage of a good sale to the Seto gardeners.

Ornamental gardens did not get much attention on Seto farms. Simple flowerbeds were made under the living room window and were usually surrounded by a dense high fence. Sometimes ornamental gardens with several flowerbeds and a bench, surrounded by a fence with a gate, were laid out at the side or front wall of the dwelling house. Typical flowers

grown in these gardens were monkhoods, fire lilies, bleeding hearts, cutleaf coneflowers, and dahlias.

2.2. Creating the Seto farm garden

The design and content of the museum's Seto farm garden are based on historical research and represent the period from 1950 to 1960. It does not duplicate a specific garden, but rather gives a generalized picture of a typical garden from that period. Between the dwelling house and the storehouse, there is a yard where usually nothing was cultivated. A small fenced flowerbed is situated under the living room window. A combined vegetable garden and orchard are located on one side of the yard, surrounded by a dense and high picket fence.

Along with studying history, expeditions for finding and collecting old garden plants were organised. The aim was to bring to the museum as many plants from the authentic Seto farm gardens as possible. Perennials (ornamentals and vegetables) and old cultivars of fruit trees and garden berries were relatively easy to find, as they live for many years and are often



Fig. 5. The fruit and kitchen garden of Seto farm in spring 2015. Photo by A. Banner.

preserved in gardens. Annual and biennial garden plants need constant propagation from seeds. Instead of doing this, today gardeners prefer to buy new seeds each year and heritage cultivars tend to disappear from gardens. For this reason, we have also obtained some vegetable seeds from trade, but even then we have preferred older or local cultivars. Some specific fruit cultivars were propagated for us in the Polli Horticultural Research Centre. All plants brought to and planted in the garden are well documented and described.

Seto farm garden was established in the spring of 2015. After building fences, the garden plot was covered with a thick layer of planting soil and the surface was smoothed. One part of it was reserved for an orchard, and grass seeds were sown there, whereas several vegetable beds were made in the other part. Flowerbeds were made in the same spring.



Fig 6. First vegetable beds in the Seto farm garden in spring 2015. Photo by A. Banner.

2.3. Managing and developing the garden

Seto farm garden complements the permanent exhibition and serves as a place to introduce the Seto way of living. Although we have collected several plants from the gardens in the Seto region, our collection is still incomplete and needs further replenishment. We have good contacts with some research institutions and other organizations who help us by providing necessary plant material. The Polli Horticultural Research Centre has already been mentioned, but we have got seeds and support also from the Estonian Crop Research Institute and a seed saving organization, NGO Maadjas.

There is one full-time and one part-time gardener at the Estonian Open Air Museum, taking care of all our gardens, including the Seto farm garden. They are helped by volunteers and trainees. The Estonian Open Air Museum has a well-functioning partnership with the Kopli Vocational School of Tallinn. Their horticulture students take part in preparing the vegetable plot of the Seto farm garden each spring and learn about Seto gardening traditions and traditional garden plants.



Fig.7. Trainees from the Kopli Vocational School help to prepare vegetable beds in the Seto farm garden. Photo by A. Banner.



Fig. 8. Vegetable garden on the Seto farm. Photo by A. Banner.



Fig. 9 and 10. Perennials in front of a dwelling house and vigorous *Dahlias* originate from authentic farm gardens in the Seto region. Photos by A. Banner.






Fig. 11 and 12. Workshop on natural plant protection products in the Seto farm garden.
Photo by A. Banner.






Museums are well-known informal educational institutions. Thus, museum gardens serve as good starting points for spreading knowledge about agrobiodiversity, heritage plants, and sustainable gardening. For this purpose, we have introduced heritage plants and gardening issues on public events, arranged guided garden tours, programs for children, workshops, and seminars.

We intend to label the most important and characteristic heritage plants in the Seto farm garden and to lead visitors to our homepage where they can find more information about these plants. In addition, a bigger information board about plants and the history of gardening is going to be set up next to the garden.



2.4. List of plants





Following is a list of plants originating from farms and households in the Seto region or other areas in Southeast Estonia.

Photo	Latin name	English name	Year	Origin
	<i>Aconitum</i>	monkshood, aconite	2014	as a plant from Karnaski household, Saatse village
	<i>Allium cepa</i>	potato onion	2015	as a plant from Pärna farm, Kasepää village
	<i>Armoracia rusticana</i>	horseradish	2014	as a plant from Loha farm, Korela village

	<i>Aquilegia vulgaris</i>	common columbine	2014	as a plant from Karnaski household, Saatse village
	<i>Asparagus officinalis</i>	garden asparagus	2015	as seeds from Lepa farm, Lutepää village
	<i>Aster</i>	aster	2014	as a plant from Vare household, Väike-Rääptsova village
	<i>Cerasus</i>	sour cherry	2015	as a plant from Tõrvametsa farm, Kundruse village
	<i>Cosmos bipinnatus</i>	garden cosmos	2019	as seeds from Triinu Guerrin, Külaotsa village
	<i>Cucumis sativus</i>	cucumber	2016	as seeds from Savi farm, Kolossova village

	<i>Dahlia</i>	dahlia	2014	as a plant from Kuno farm, Saabolda village
	<i>Dahlia</i>	dahlia	2014	as a plant from Loha farm, Korela village
	<i>Dahlia</i>	dahlia	2014	as a plant from Lätte farm, Saatse village
	<i>Dianthus barbatus</i>	sweet William	2013	as seeds from Ala-Pliini farm, Perdaku village
	<i>Hemerocallis fulva</i>	orange day-lily	2014	as a plant from Sergana farm, Rääptsova village
	Lilium	fire lily	2014	as a plant from Sergana farm, Rääptsova village

	Malus domestica	apple tree seedling	2014	as seeds from Nikolai Riitsaar household, Rääptsova village
	Pisum sativum 'Vanaema hernes'	garden pea	2019	conservation cultivar from Vanaema aed , Rebasemõisa village, Valga county
	Paeonia lactiflora	peony	2014	as a plant from Sergana farm, Rääptsova village
	<i>Phlox paniculata</i>	garden phlox	2014	as a plant from Kuuse farm, Vedernika village
	<i>Phlox paniculata</i>	garden phlox	2014	as a plant from Sergana farm, Rääptsova village

	<i>Pyrus</i>	pear tree	2014	as seeds from Tsütski village
	<i>Rheum</i>	rhubarb	2015	as a plant from Väike-Liivaku farm, Lutepää village
	<i>Saponaria officinalis</i>	common soapwort	2014	as a plant from Vassili Reola household, Rääptsova village
	<i>Vicia faba</i> 'Helbi'	broad bean	2016	conservation cultivar from Helbi village

3. In conclusion

Latest changes in the field of economy, environment, and health care have reminded us of the importance of subsistence activities. The popularity of gardening activities and home-grown food has risen and people are looking for forgotten and new knowledge. We have also seen the growing interest of museum visitors in gardening issues and local food crops.

The Seto farm garden mediates the gardening traditions and historical garden plants characteristic of the Seto region. Plants have become an essential part of the museum's permanent exhibition. At the same time, the museum has become a place for introducing

garden heritage and agrobiodiversity. This is important, as the more people know and grow heritage cultivars the better they are saved for the future.