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# Orange cauliflower to debut at stores

Bright orange cauliflower has joined its white, purple and lime-green cousins this season at farmers markets and produce stands across the nation and is set to make its big commercial debut this fall.

Developing the plant took vegetable breeder Michael Dickson, a researcher at Cornell University, more than two decades of work, starting by crossbreeding white cauliflower with a smaller, less flavorful orange variety discovered in a Canadian marsh in 1970.



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"I think it's a neat way to get your kids to eat their vegetables," said Flannery Higgins, a spokeswoman for Johnny's Selected Seeds, a Winslow, Maine-based company that has sold out of seeds for the colorful vegetable.

"People are always looking for something different or something new to try, so they're just intrigued by this."

Mr. Dickson published his work on the plant in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and he distributed orange cauliflower seeds experimentally in 1992. This year is the first time the seeds will be available to the large commercial growers who sell their vegetables to supermarkets.

In addition to its unusual color, the orange cauliflower combines a flavor nearly indistinguishable from that of traditional varieties with a higher nutritional value, containing more than 25 times more vitamin A than white cauliflower.

Johnny's has sold seeds for a lime-green cauliflower for years, said Steve Bellavia, the company's vegetable product manager.

Orange cauliflower is the latest in experimental varieties, said Doug Ranno, a partner at Colorful Harvest, a Monterey, Calif.-based produce company that specializes in unusually

colored vegetables.

The company also has grown purple cauliflower and a spiky white cauliflower, but Mr. Ranno said the orange variety has the most potential because it is relatively easy to grow and resistant to bruising. The vegetable has made its way into stores, he said, though "mostly on a trial basis."

The orange cauliflower's flavor is "a little bit more creamy" than that of white cauliflower, he said, adding that it keeps its color if lightly steamed. His company's purple variety turns dark blue when cooked.

The company also has marketed scarlet sweet corn, and yellow and red carrots, all of which are sold nationwide at prices slightly higher than those of traditional varieties.

"We expect to have commercial quantities [of orange cauliflower] available to many growing areas by the fall," said Gary Koppenjan, a spokesman for Seminis, a California-based company that released the citrus variety being sold on a small scale in seed catalogs.

"Every time we have sent out samples to growers or shippers, they have come back asking for more, so we think this is going to be a big product," he said. "There's certainly going to be some novelty when this first comes out, but we believe that what's going to make this a big seller is its nutritional appeal."

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