



Preserving Our Roots

My Journey to Save Seeds and Stories

JOHN COYKENDALL with CHRISTINA MELTON
Photographs by **SARAH HACKENBERG**

A FALL 2019 RELEASE

For over four decades, John Coykendall’s passion has been preserving the farm heritage of a small community in rural southeastern Louisiana. A Tennessee native and longtime master gardener at Blackberry Farm, Coykendall has become a celebrity in a growing movement that places a premium on farm-to-table cuisine with locally sourced, organic, and heirloom foods and flavors. While his work takes him around the world searching for seeds and the cultural knowledge of how to grow them, what inspires him most is his annual pilgrimage to Louisiana.

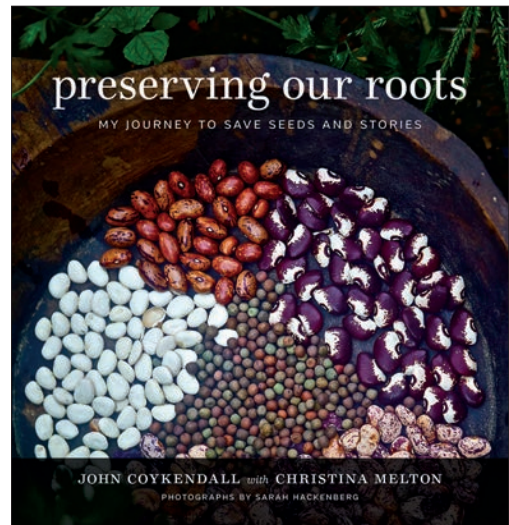
Drawn to the Washington Parish area as a college student, Coykendall forged long-lasting friendships with local farmers and gardeners. Over the decades, he has recorded oral histories, recipes, tall tales, agricultural knowledge, and wisdom from generations past in more than eighty illustrated and handwritten journals. At the same time, he has unearthed and safeguarded rare varieties of food crops once grown in the area, then handed them back to the community.

In *Preserving Our Roots: My Journey to Save Seeds and Stories*, Coykendall shares a wealth of materials collected in his journals, ensuring they are passed on to future generations. Organized by season, the book offers a narrative chronicle of Coykendall’s visits to Washington Parish since 1973. He highlights staple crops, agricultural practices, and favorite recipes from the families and friends who have hosted him. Accompanied by a rich selection of drawings, journal pages, and photographs—along with over forty recipes—*Preserving Our Roots* chronicles Coykendall’s passion for recording foods and narratives that capture the rhythms of daily life on farms, in kitchens, and across generations.

JOHN COYKENDALL, an internationally renowned horticulturalist and seed saver, is master gardener at Blackberry Farm in Walland, Tennessee. A classically trained artist, he holds an MFA from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston.

CHRISTINA MELTON is an Alfred I. duPont–Columbia University Award-winning documentary filmmaker from Louisiana, whose work includes *Atchafalaya Houseboat* and *A Summer of Birds: John James Audubon in Louisiana*.

SARAH HACKENBERG is a photographer and graphic designer based in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Her work has been featured in the *Baton Rouge Advocate*, *Country Roads*, *Garden and Gun*, and the documentary *Deeply Rooted*.



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