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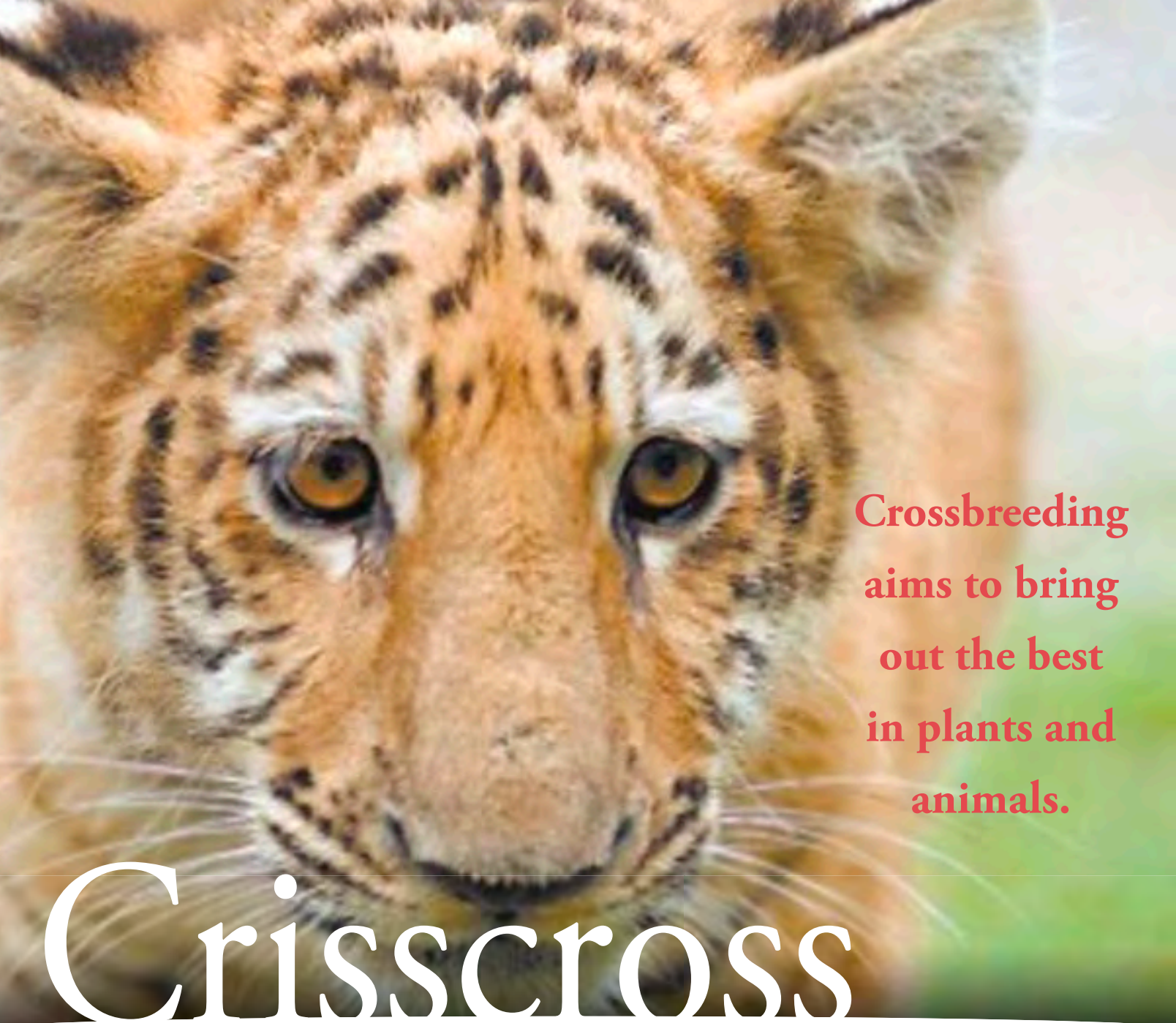
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Details Inside

**Cross-
breeding**

Are You Ready
to Mix It Up?



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Crossbreeding
aims to bring
out the best
in plants and
animals.

Crisscross

by Courtney McLaughlin

T Stop me if you've heard this one. What do you get when you cross a lion and a tiger? A liger. What do you get when you cross a plum and an apricot?

A Pluot.

What do you get when you cross a Golden Retriever and a Poodle? A Goldendoodle.

They read like riddles from a child's favorite joke book, but the above answers are real plants and

animals, created by crossbreeding. From disease and drought resistant crops to heartier, healthier dogs to animals that tip the scales at more than 1,000 pounds, the results of this ancient practice can be seen in our everyday lives.

Lion and Tigers and Ligers – Oh My!

Ligers look and sound like an animal produced in a lab by a mad scientist, but this cross between a male lion and female tiger started in the wild. According to Lea Jaunakais, founder of Tiger World in Rockwell, N.C., ligers go back hundreds of

years when big cat territories overlapped. "A liger is very unique," says Jaunakais. "They have diffused, tiger-like stripes, but most of their coat is tan like a lion and sometimes they have spots."

Tiger World does not breed ligers. Its mission is to rescue big cats and other exotic animals displaced from zoo closings or given up by owners. Tiger World has two ligers - Radar and Lil' Wayne. They are a popular attraction with visitors and often make sounds as distinctive as their coats. "Ligers chuff like a tiger, but also moan like a lion. They are very affectionate like lions

and independent like tigers,” says Jaunakais.

Due to deforestation and the dwindling populations of both lions and tigers, ligers are no longer found in the wild. Granted that hasn't stopped people from breeding them, Jaunakais notes. And there are often physical and genetic mutations that show up in cubs. Often weighing half a ton, these big cats also mean big challenges for their handlers.

Producing Better Produce

Did you have a pluot with your breakfast? Enjoy a seedless watermelon this summer? Give an apple to your teacher? If you answered yes to any of the above questions, you have reaped (and eaten) the benefits of crossbreeding fruits and vegetables.

Agricultural crossbreeding (creating what is often termed “hybrids”) goes back to the earliest days of farming. In 1865, Gregor Mendel, the father of genetics, published his findings about statistics and the transmission of plant traits. Crossbreeding not only puts juicier peaches and sweeter apples in the grocery store, it means produce with tougher skin for easier shipping, a longer picking season and foods requiring less space and labor to grow and harvest.

Dr. Jim Ballington is a professor and small fruit crop breeder at North Carolina State University in Raleigh, N.C. His passion is blueberries.



Above: Plums + apricots = Pluots.



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He hopes his research will culminate into antioxidant-packed fruit more resistant to disease and drought, and cheaper to grow. “One of the main things in cross-breeding is to improve disease and pest resistance and improve quality,” says Ballington.

Take heirloom tomatoes, suggests Ballington. Heirloom tomatoes taste wonderful, but are susceptible to many diseases. But if you can combine the taste of an heirloom with the hearty traits of a conventional tomato – you could have the best of both worlds. “What you’re always trying to do is improve,” he says.

But crossbreeding doesn’t only result in a better plant - it means one-of-a-kind palate pleasers that are good for you! Today more

than 20 varieties of Pluots (plums/apricots) are available throughout the summer season. With names like Dapple Dandy, Flavor King, Flavor Rich and Flavor Prince, these fruits can compete with your favorite sweet treat.

Roll Over Pure Breeds

Craig and Wendy Birchfield love their three-year-old Goldendoodle named Boyer. A cross between a Golden Retriever and a Poodle, he’s athletic, smart and the perfect family dog for their two girls. “He’s the best dog we’ve ever owned,” says Wendy.

The Birchfields are just one of many families catching on to the hybrid dog craze. Also termed “designer dogs,” these canines are created from two purebred dogs. “Hybrid dog popularity started with Cock-a-Poos (Cocker Spaniel/Poodle) and Labradoodles (Labrador Retriever/Poodle),” says Markus Richmond, president and CEO

of American Canine Hybrid Club. “It really didn’t become anything anyone knew about until the celebrities had them – then it became very popular.” These unique dogs appeal to the person who wants something special.

Besides the creation of funny-sounding names – Bullmatian (Bull Mastiff and Dalmatian), Yorkipoo (Yorkie and Poodle) and Dorkie (Dachshund and Yorkshire Terrier) to name a few – the more than 250 varieties of hybrid breeds also reduce genetic weaknesses sometimes found in purebred dogs. “The advantage is you get a heartier dog,” says Richmond. “You are increasing the genetic pool and trying to bring out the best qualities in the dogs you have.”

Richmond advises anyone looking to purchase or adopt a hybrid dog to check out the parents carefully, ask lots of questions and remember that the personalities of dogs vary from pup to pup.



Above: Designed to shed less and to be mostly hypoallergenic the Goldendoodle (Golden Retriever/Poodle) has become a popular breed.

See a liger up close at Tiger World.

What: Tiger World is an animal conservation and educational center dedicated to the rescue, rehabilitation and preservation of exotic animals.

Where: Tiger World is located 15 minutes from Lowe’s Motor Speedway, four miles from I-85 on Highway 152 in Rockwell, N.C.



Hours: Guided tours are available by appointment only Monday through Friday (closed Wednesdays). Tiger World is open for self-guided walkabout tours Saturday and Sunday from 9 a.m.-5 p.m. with no appointment needed.

Admission: \$12 for adults; \$10 for children two to 12. Free for seniors 62 and older, and children younger than two. Group and other discounts are available.

For more information visit www.tigerworld.us