FOR THE LOVE OF TOMATOES

Everything you ever wanted to know about the tomato

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“Regal and delectable, the tomato is the crowning glory in my vegetable garden.”

- P. Allen Smith
TV Host, Author & Lifestyle Expert

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TOMATO TOUR
Whether you say toMAYto or toMAHto, a perfect tomato garden has different varieties for all your summer dish needs.

SLICER
When you’re dreaming of ripe, juicy slices to complement the perfect sandwich, grow slicers. You can plant a beefsteak variety that will grow to a hefty size and tends to have ribs and lobes in its shape. Globe type slicers are more round and smooth in appearance.

Some examples:
• Big Beef: a large, beefsteak tomato with an old-fashioned flavor.
• Seattle’s Best: better-suited for cooler climates.
• Park’s Whopper: high yields; greater resistance to diseases.

Cherry/Grape
These varieties are great for salads, or for eating like candy straight out of the garden. They are exceptionally sweet and produce in clusters. Clip off a stem full of fruit and let guests pick their own tomatoes at the table. Cherry varieties typically have a round shape and come in a range of sizes, colors and flavors, so you will want to plant more than one variety. Grape varieties are small and oblong. Think of them as a petite version of a roma tomato – meaty with a thicker skin.

Some examples:
• Grape (Tami G): sweet, dark red variety that is disease-resistant.
• Black Cherry: one plant is all you need for a summer full of sweet, dark fruit.
• Husky Cherry Red: the classic cherry tomato perfect for snacking.
HEIRLOOM

Biting into an heirloom is like biting into a piece of history. As the name implies, these varieties have been passed down from one generation to the next. Unusual colors and shapes add a special touch to the garden. They are a flavorful treat you can usually only find in a backyard garden or farmer’s market.

Some examples:
• Bradley: great for canning and freezing.
• Golden Jubilee: golden-orange fruit, mild flavor; few seeds.
• San Francisco Fog: produces clusters of round red fruits, about the size of golf balls.

HYBRID

Hybrid varieties are created by cross-pollinating two different varieties of a plant, with the end goal being to create a hybrid that contains the best qualities of the parent plants. Hybrids tend to be more disease resistant and more productive. They also perform well in various growing conditions.

Some examples:
• Early Girl: bears a lot of fruit for an early harvest and continues to produce throughout the summer.
• Heatmaster: great for climates where temperatures rise above 95 degrees.
• Indigo Rose: heavy producer whether planted in the ground or in a container.

CLICK HERE
Still trying to decide which variety to plant? Try the Bonnie Tomato Chooser. This handy tool offers options for helping you narrow down choices so you get the perfect tomato for your garden. bonnieplants.com/tomatoes/choose-your-tomato/
MY FIRST TOMATO TIP: Cherry tomatoes are great no matter your gardening level. Easy to care for cherries are ideal for the first time gardener.

Cherry tomatoes:
• Are easy to grow.
• Are heat-tolerant.
• Are resistant to many tomato diseases.
• Set fruit within just a few weeks of planting.
• Grow great in the garden or in containers.
• Are delicious to eat straight off the plant—no slicing required.
• Some great varieties to try: Black Cherry, Sun Gold, Husky Cherry Red, Sun Sugar, Sweet ‘n’ Neat, and Super Sweet 100.
Biting into a juicy, ripe tomato fresh from the garden is one of life’s simple pleasures. But, not all tomatoes are not created equal. Use this basic guide to help you choose the right tomato for you, from flavor to acidity.

Flavor development is part chemistry and part growing conditions—temperature, sun, and soil. Flavor is a balance of a tomato’s acidity as well as sugar content. For example, a tomato with a higher sugar content and lower acidity will taste sweeter than a tomato with a higher acidity and lower sugar content.

**GROWING CONDITIONS FOR FLAVOR**

**Temperature:** The ideal growing temperature is 80s during the day and 60s at night. When temperatures are higher, plants may struggle to set fruit. Cooler temperatures affect the plant’s ability to fully develop its flavor compounds. It’s best to choose varieties suited to your gardening zone.

**Soil:** Incorporating lots of organic matter, potassium, and sulfur into the soil can help maximize flavor. Also, water sparingly as fruits begin to mature—dry soil concentrates flavor compounds. Soils high in clay content retain nutrients better than sandier soils, which leads to better flavor.

**Sun:** Six to eight hours of full sunlight helps develop the fruit’s flavor. Intense sunlight maximizes photosynthesis, which allows the plants to develop carbohydrates that turn into sugar, acid, and other compounds that make up the flavor.

**CHOOSING THE BEST FLAVOR**

**Size of fruit:** Smaller varieties, cherry or grape, have higher sugar concentrations so they’re sweeter than full-size varieties.

**Color of fruit:** Different pigments produce a different balance of sugars and acids. Orange, yellow, and pink tomatoes are often lower in acidity. These varieties tend be milder in flavor than the classic red varieties. Black tomatoes, on the other hand, have a more complex flavor—some people love it, some don’t.

**Foliation:** Plants with dense, healthy leaves can capture a lot of sunlight, aiding in the development of more sugars, creating a sweeter tomato. Try to keep foliage healthy to really develop the fruit’s flavor.
HEIRLOOM OR HYBRID: WHICH DO I CHOOSE?
Deciding whether to grow heirloom or hybrid tomatoes is really a matter of preference; each type has its advantages.

A n heirloom tomato is one that has been in circulation for at least 50 years and is open-pollinated. Many times, heirloom seeds have been passed down through generations within a family.

ADVANTAGES OF HEIRLOOM TOMATOES
• An heirloom’s top quality is its exceptional flavor.
• Herlooms are also known for their unique colors and shapes.
• These varieties have great history.
• They are the best storytellers in the garden.

Hybrid tomatoes are created by crossing two selected varieties with the goal of producing plants with the best traits of each plant. Hybrid varieties should not be confused with genetically-modified organisms (GMOs). The DNA in a GMO plant has been altered in a way that cannot occur naturally. GMO plants can include the insertion of genes from other species. All Bonnie plants and seeds are non-GMO

ADVANTAGES OF HYBRID TOMATOES
• Hybrids tend to be vigorous plants, resulting in higher yields.
• They have a more consistent and uniform look.
• They produce better in bad weather or questionable growing conditions.
• Disease resistance is a key trait of hybrid varieties.
HEIRLOOM STORIES:

Heirloom tomatoes provide a unique look and flavor to your favorite dishes, from a tomato and mayonnaise sandwich to a fresh summer salad. They also have some great stories to go along with your dish or meal. Here are just a few great heirloom tales.

Arkansas Traveler
This deep pink beauty originated in the Ozark Mountains before 1900. This heirloom variety is prized for its flavor and its resistance to cracking. This is a great choice for drier climates as this heirloom is a good producer even in drought and hot temperatures.

Amish Paste Roma
As its name suggests, this variety hails from the Amish country in Wisconsin. This firm-textured tomato has fewer seeds than most, making it a great variety for sauces as well as canning. This variety also slices well for salads and sandwiches.

Black Prince
When one thinks of Siberia, “tomato” is probably not the first word to come to mind; but, that’s exactly where this variety comes from. And, since this variety originated in a cold climate, it does quite well in cooler climates where other varieties may not thrive, as well as warmer climates. It has a red-purplish color and is known for its rich, sweet flavor.

Cherokee Purple
This variety originated in Tennessee, but is believed to have been passed down from Native Americans of the Cherokee Tribe. This is one of the first varieties in the “black” tomato family. Plants produce large beefsteak fruit with a deep red-purplish color. They look and taste great on sandwiches.

Heinz Classic
If you think this variety has something to do with ketchup, you’d be correct. This variety is one of the first Heinz-bred seed varieties used specifically for Heinz ketchup. This tomato has that classic tomato flavor people look for. This variety is great sliced on sandwiches or used in sauces and stews.

Mr. Stripey
If you’re looking to add a burst of color to the garden, try Mr. Stripey. This beefsteak variety produces fruit with an unexpected yellow to orange color with irregular red stripes. This variety has a high sugar content making it a pleasantly sweet tomato, great for sandwiches.

Mortgage Lifter
This classic heirloom variety started in West Virginia in the 1940s. A radiator repairman crossed four of the biggest tomatoes he could find and produced this beauty. He sold seedlings and was able to pay off his $6000 mortgage in six years. Over 60 years later, it’s still popular in West Virginia, as well as other parts of the country. This extra-large tomato is perfect for slicing and adding to sandwiches.

Rutgers
The Rutgers heirloom tomato is an old favorite among gardeners. It is named after Rutgers University, where it was introduced in 1934. It’s proven itself through the years to be a reliable, highly productive variety. It’s so popular, it’s been used often as the parent in the breeding of many hybrid varieties. This tomato is a large globe variety and great for canning.

Yellow Pear
This cherry tomato looks like a big burst of sunshine when it’s ripe, making it one of the prettiest tomatoes in the garden. If you’re looking to have a cherry tomato crop all season, this is the variety to plant—it’s a dependable and vigorous plant.
CONTAIN YOURSELF
Growing tomatoes in containers
Don’t let a lack of space keep you from realizing your dreams of growing your own tomatoes. Tomatoes are easy to grow in containers.

- Start with a large container, minimum of five gallons.
- Use premium potting soil NOT garden soil.
- Provide six to eight hours of sunlight.
- Use stakes or cages as some of the larger in-determinate varieties can grow as tall as 10 feet or more.
- Use slow-release fertilizer to start, then use a water-soluble fertilizer every two weeks.
- Water more frequently as container soil dries out faster than in-ground garden soil.
- Add a little mulch to the pot to help with water retention.
Paste Tomatoes

CHARACTERISTICS:
- meaty dense flesh
- low seed count
- low water content

Bonnie Varieties to try:
- Roma
- Amish Paste
- Heinz Super
- San Marzano Heirloom

Uses:
- salsa
- paste
- sauces

WATCH TOMATO & FOOD PAIRINGS
Slicing Tomatoes
CHARACTERISTICS:
- large
- much higher juice level

Bonnie Varieties to try:
- Mortgage Lifter
- Bradley Heirloom
- Celebrity

Uses:
- sandwiches
- pizza
- caprese salad

Cherry Tomatoes
CHARACTERISTICS:
- sweet
- small
- "snacking" size

Bonnie Varieties to try:
- Black Cherry
- Grape
- Juliet
- Sun Gold
- Husky Cherry Red
- Super Sweet 100

Uses:
- snacking
- salads
- shish kebabs

Bonnie Plants website: bonnieplants.com
GET GROWING

If you want your tomato crop to really take off, there are a few basic principles you need to know before you get started.

- **Sunlight:** Tomato plants need at least six to eight hours of full sun.
- **Space:** Place each plant approximately 2 feet apart for determinate varieties and approximately 3 feet apart for indeterminate varieties.
- **Timing:** Don’t plant tomatoes until threat of last frost has passed and night temperatures stay above 50 degrees F.
- **Soil:** Most tomato plants do best in soil with a pH of 6.2-6.8; keep soil fed by mixing a time-released or organic fertilizer into the soil, adding 3 to 4 inches of compost.
- **Depth:** Bury two-thirds of the plant’s stem to grow strong plants.
- **Mulch:** A layer of mulch keeps the soil moist and keeps out weeds.

Providing support is an important component of the tomato garden. Sturdy supports will keep plants off the ground as they grow, as well as train plants in which direction to go. Choose from three types of support, depending on your gardening style.
**Stakes**

- Are simple and inexpensive.
- Can be wooden, plastic, or bamboo; or make your own from pipe or other reclaimed materials.
- Drive stake about 1 foot into the ground and tie plant to stake as it grows.
- Use soft ties; many gardeners like to use 8 inch strips of panty hose.
- The stake placements are determined by the planting.

**Cages**

- Don’t need ties.
- Wire cages work well for most varieties. The most common cage size is 54 inches. There are taller varieties available that work better for indeterminate tomatoes.
- Make your own with 5 feet of 10-gauge concrete reinforcement with 6 inch openings.
- The cage placements are determined by the planting.

**Wire Trellis**

- Are a combination of using a cage and stake.
- Are a great way to add a decorative touch to the garden.
- Use poles or four-inch wooden posts set about 10 feet apart.
- Sink poles deep enough and make securely anchored to support the weight of plants as they grow and bear fruit.
- Staple or tie concrete reinforcement wire mesh (available at home improvement stores) around posts.
- Leave approximately 1 foot opening at the bottom so garden tools can pass underneath.
- Plant tomatoes along trellis - approximately 2 feet apart for determinant varieties and approximately 3 feet apart for indeterminate varieties.
- Train stems to wind through trellis, tying when needed.
- Will last several years, but practice crop rotation each year to avoid build-up of insects and diseases in the soil. Some suggested options to use for crop rotation are beans, peas or cucumbers.
Grow Better!

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