

Tomato Varieties

Before the 1940's, most garden vegetables were what is commonly known as open pollinated, that is, seeds could be collected from the plant and the same variety would grow from that seed the next year. After World War II, seed companies started hybridizing closely related plants to produce varieties that were higher yielding, easier to ship and more disease resistant. As the American public also got farther away from the farm, they began to buy more produce from grocery stores. In fact some vegetables are picked unripe and then artificially ripened in warehouse conditions. Tomatoes are one of these.

Due to the bland flavor of many vegetables including tomatoes, many have begun to find alternative sources for their produce. They may purchase fresh vegetables from produce stands and farmers markets or grow them themselves. Another trend that has been occurring is that many people are again growing open pollinated vegetables over modern hybrids. Although hybrid varieties are fine to grow, many claim these older varieties are better and have a more distinct taste than modern hybrids. These older, open pollinated varieties are often referred to as heritage or heirloom varieties. Heirloom varieties are becoming more available at local garden centers in both seed and transplants.

Although we cannot cover all heritage varieties, tomatoes have been especially popular. Some also have very interesting stories behind them. One, called Mortgage Lifter, was developed by a man during the great depression. He kept cross-pollinating his four favorite varieties until he came up with an excellent tasting tomato that also had stable seed and could be planted from year to year. Due to the depression, the man was afraid he was going to lose his house. However, he was able to pay of his mortgage in four years due to the popularity of his tomato. Folks lined up around the block to buy it.

Another variety, Rutgers, was also developed in the 1930's by Campbell's Soup and Rutgers University. It not only has great taste but is also great for canning and food storage. Although not considered an heirloom variety, Roma is another open-pollinated variety considered very suitable for canning and sauces.

Many heirloom varieties have creative names such as Bloody Butcher. This particular variety ripens very early and will produce until frost. It is a great replacement for Fourth-of-July and other early tomatoes. The fruit size ranges between four and six ounces, and has a deep red color.

Cherokee Purple is another interesting tomato. This tomato has been grown for over 100 years by the Cherokee people. It has a thick skin and a sweet flavor and a deep red color. Black Krim is another excellent purple variety that is very heat tolerant, but can be susceptible to cracking.

The Brandywine tomato can reach over a pound in size and weight, and is considered a slicing tomato great for sandwiches and hamburgers. It is disease resistant and the true Brandywine tomato has excellent flavor. In fact, it is considered a standard by which other tomatoes are judged.

There are literally hundreds of varieties of heirloom tomatoes available. Local vendors carry many of the more popular types and others can be found online. The same holds true for other garden

vegetables. If you don't have the time or space to grow these, they can be purchased at the local farmer's market and many produce stands.

We would also like to announce that the North Logan Library is currently offering a series of Gardening classes, free to the public, taught every Tuesday at 2:00, and are scheduled to go through mid-May. The class covers a broad range of topics including vegetable gardening, fruit production, underutilized plants in the landscape, and many more. We would be happy to have you attend.