

Tomato Varieties

First, there are more tomato varieties than can be discussed in one, two or three articles.

Determinate tomatoes grow to a certain size, generally between three and five feet, and bear most of their fruit within a four- to six-week period.

Indeterminate tomatoes grow and bear fruit all summer, until the arrival of frost. These types need support, such as trellises, stakes or cages, to keep them from sprawling on the ground, where the fruit tends to rot.

Also consider the plant's susceptibility to disease. Many hybrid varieties have been bred to resist diseases that often plague tomatoes. Look on plant labels or in catalog descriptions for the letters V, F, N, T and A. If present, these letters indicate that the variety is resistant to Verticillium wilt, Fusarium wilt, nematodes, Tobacco mosaic virus or Alternaria stem canker.

The popular heirloom tomatoes offer a wide spectrum of choices in taste, color, texture and shape. While heirlooms are sometimes not as productive as hybrids and tend to be more susceptible to disease, many home gardeners appreciate their unique characteristics.

Cherry tomatoes also tend to ripen early. They are ideal for salads and snacking, and children love them. Some more unusual open-pollinated varieties include 'Black Cherry', 'Blush', 'Isis Candy' and 'Blue Berries'. My favorite is the "Yellow Pear".

If you're a fan of large, beefy red tomatoes, consider heirlooms such as 'Beefsteak', 'Mortgage Lifter' and 'Boxcar Willie'. 'Genuwine', a hybrid, is a cross between 'Brandywine' and 'Costoluto Genovese'. It is higher yielding and more productive than either parent, and with an estimated 70 days to maturity, it should produce earlier than most other beefsteaks.

Are you looking for a paste tomato for sauces and preserving? Some choice varieties include 'Roma', 'San Marzano', 'Opalka' and 'Big Mama'. The first three are heirlooms. 'Roma' is the earliest producer and the best suited for container growing. 'Big Mama' is a prolific hybrid.

Maybe you would like to grow tomatoes in a variety of colors. Sliced on a platter, they make a beautiful presentation. 'Cherokee Purple' is an old favorite among the larger black tomatoes. 'Paul Robeson' is another heirloom black type with medium-sized fruit.

Next week, a discussion on Heirloom Tomatoes.