



Heirloom Tomatoes

Heirloom tomatoes, like many heirloom vegetables, have gained attention in recent years, and with good reason. An heirloom is a variety of plant that has been open-pollinated (by insects, birds, or wind). Most mass-produced hybrids today's plants are produced through controlled pollination. This is when seeds of a crop are descendants from parents with known traits. Open pollination allows for a wider variety of seeds and plants available for human and animal consumption. Heirloom varieties are also usually defined by being in existence for more than 50 years. Others define an heirloom as those before 1951, when the first hybrids for mass production were introduced. Heirloom varieties of fruits and vegetables, as well as flowers, are becoming more available due to the belief that they are better in taste, disease resistance, and in some cases, even higher yields.

There are many different sources of heirloom tomato seeds and plants. Some of my personal favorites are Seed Savers (www.seedsavers.org), Seeds of Change (www.seedsofchange.org), Victory Seeds (www.victoryseeds.com) and Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds (www.bakercreek.com).

In addition to better tasting fruit, many heirloom tomato varieties come in a wide variety of colors, shapes and sizes, all offering their own benefits. For example, white or green tomatoes are some of the best for low-acidity. Pink, red, and dark purple tomatoes are often the best full-flavored slicing tomatoes you can find. Yellow or orange tomatoes have a great combination of medium acidity, good size and taste, and a bountiful production of fruit.

Over the years of growing heirloom varieties, along with fellow gardeners, I've amassed a list of some of the best tomatoes in each category. The following are some of the best tasting producers that we've had luck with. Hopefully you will, too!

Red (slicers)

Wisconsin 55
Rutgers
Pantano Romanesco
Costoluto Genovese

Pink

Arkansas Traveler
Pink Oxheart
German Pink

Yellow/Orange

Dr. Wyche's Yellow
Nebraska Wedding
Golden Bison
Mr. Stripey
Orange Banana
Amana Orange

Green/White

Wapsinicon Peach
Green Zebra

Cherry

Reisentraube
Tommy Toe
Yellow Pear

Purple

Black Krim
Cherokee Purple
Brandywine