

Heirloom Tomato Choices

Heirloom tomatoes survive time. You can enjoy the history of these heirloom tomatoes as much as their enduring flavors.

By Anita B. Stone | Photos By S. Tullock

Green Zebra: green stripes and great flavor help this heirloom pretty up any salad. For down-home taste, nothing beats fruits that have been enjoying a renaissance more than 200 years.

Most are durable, firm and thick, possess smooth skins free of 'crack' (seams radiating out from the stem on the shoulder of the fruit) and burst (splitting at the blossom end).

Heirlooms set fruit near the bottom of each plant; less fruit develops later, higher up on the plant. Here are 14 inspiring heirloom tomatoes: Cherokee Purple, grown by the Cherokee Indians during the 1800s, blooms 80 days after planting and boasts a sweet smoky taste with a tomato 'tang.' Each 12 oz purplish-red fruit endures heat conditions.

Green Zebra: A low-acid, 2-inch round fruit is the sweet-tasting Green Zebra, a tomato stippled with dark green strips that ripen to a yellow-gold with dark green zebra-like stripes. The fruit is great for salads.

Black Prince: a "true Siberian slicing tomato," tops in taste tests.

More...

Read Anita's heirloom glossary and growing tips>>

Mexico midget is one of several varieties said to have been brought over on The Mayflower in 1620. The round sweet red ½" fruits are great for salads and are a prolific producer.

Hold on to your trellises: Check out the story behind the Mortgage Lifter heirloom tomato>> Known as a "true Siberian slicing tomato," Black Prince is rated in the top ten best tasting tomato varieties according to a national taste test. The garnet-colored fruit matures in cold climates 70 days after planting seeds. The plant is perfect for patio gardens.

Sugar Lump is a sweet-tasting cherry tomato of German origin, producing heavy clusters of 6 – 12 deep-red-fruits that hang like grapes, until frost. Each fruit is about ¾ - 1 inch in diameter, perfect for salads or snacking.

The **Golden Dwarf Champion**, produced in 1898, is a 4-5oz fruit used in breeding. The upright plant is excellent for container planting.

Introduced in 1923, the **Abraham Lincoln** is a red sweet tomato that produces clusters of round 1 – 3 lb. fruits 80 days after planting. Abe's favorite is used for making ketchup, tomato juice and slicing.

Box Car Willie, named for the King of the Hoboes, offers a smooth red color with bright orange undertones. Each 10-16 oz. fruit makes a great slicing tomato. The plant produces a heavy crop in 80 days with old fashioned flavor.

Yellow River: thin-skinned, sweet and great for canning and sauces.

Arkansas Traveler is a sweet mild-tasting fruit that matures 90 days after planting. Introduced at the University of Arkansas in 1960, the late season producer offers abundant 6-8 oz. rose-pink tomatoes.

Long Season Peach produces 8 -oz yellow-pink hearty fruits that keep from 1 – 3 months in storage after ripening 95 days after planting.

Yellow River is a thin-skinned old British sweet fruit, producing 1-1/2" yellow plum-shaped fruit used primarily for canning or sauces.

New Big Dwarf is a 1919 cross of 'Ponderosa' with 'Dwarf Champion' and produces large 1# deep pink on 2" bushy plants, great patio plant.

German Queen is a rate large-leaf plant, producing sweet, pink 2-lb. meaty beefsteak fruits for slicing.

Amana Orange is a large fruit named for the Amana colonies in Iowa. It is a sweet, tropical-like fruit flavor beefsteak that grows to two lbs with a 5" diameter.