



## "Mortgage Lifter" Heirloom Tomato

**Sales of this hearty heirloom tomato could pay a lot of bills -- so the story goes ...**

By Anita Stone | Photo Courtesy P. Beck

Mortgage Lifter: a handsome, popular heirloom.

More ...  
Read about 14 other inspiring heirloom tomatoes.

Click here for some heirloom seed sources>>

The legendary 'Mortgage Lifter' has thrilled tomato enthusiasts for more than 70 years.

When his radiator repair business slumped during the Great Depression, West Virginian, Marshall C. Byles, also known as "Radiator Charlie," began cross-breeding the largest tomatoes he could find.

He claimed to have known nothing about growing plants.

After experimenting with cross-pollination of flowers from each of five selected tomato plants, the seed was saved.

After consistently rotating the seeds for the next four years, Byles developed pinkish-red tomatoes that weighed from 1 to 2 pounds each.

**Big Tomatoes for Sale**  
Pleased with the outcome, he advertised the large beefsteak tomato as being able to feed a family of six.

When word spread about the fruit, people drove as far as 200 miles to buy the seedlings for \$1 per plant.

From the sales of these tomatoes, Byles paid off a \$6,000 mortgage on his home within four years; hence, the name Mortgage Lifter.

He continued to grow the fruit, which gained national attention, and soon hundreds of gardeners were saving seeds and growing this sweet-tasting heirloom tomato that was produced by a radiator repair man.

**To Grow a Mortgage Lifter**  
The drought-tolerant Mortgage Lifter is simple to grow from seed.

If sown indoors 4 to 6 weeks before the last frost, place each seed 1/3-inch deep in a starting tray covered with plastic film in a warm room.

When seedlings emerge, remove the plastic cover and place the tray under a fluorescent light approximately 2 inches above the seedlings.

After the final frost, plant seedlings in the garden in full sun.

Or you can plant seedlings in a four gallon pot in full sun. Seed is available at many retail or online nurseries, such as <http://monticellostore.stores.yahoo.net/600066.html>

And don't forget, if you grow the Mortgage Lifter, be sure to save the seeds, dry them out and plant them next year.