

Carrboro Farmers' Market Tomato Day 2008

TOMATO TASTING TIPS

for conducting a tomato tasting at home!

Tomatoes are all about flavor, color, size and shape.

Flavor in tomatoes is made up mostly by two main characteristics – sweet and acid. The sweet component comes from the sugars made in the plant by the sun. The bigger the plant, the more leaf area it has to intercept the sun's rays, and the more sugar it makes, so the sweeter the fruit. Yes, tomatoes are FRUITS! The best tasting tomatoes come from large plants, grown in well-balanced soil.

Tomatoes come in colors other than red. There are pink, purple, yellow, orange, green, white, and bi-colored. Pinks are red tomatoes with clear skins. Purples are a dusky rose with dark shoulders and deep brick red interiors with green seed locules (a small cavity or compartment in a plant). Yellow and Red Bicolors are huge, sweeter and more fruit like in their flavors. Greens are green when ripe, with an amber cast when ready to eat.

There are different types of tomatoes – cherries are generally small enough to pop into your mouth and often so sweet they taste like candy. Grape tomatoes are a hybrid cherry, a little like Roma's in shape and firmness, but sweeter. Roma's are a paste tomato, great for cooking, with a higher natural sugar content and meaty flesh. Saladette tomatoes are larger than cherry tomatoes, but smaller than a beefsteak or slicing tomato, and can cut into sizes that are perfect for their namesake – salads! Slicing tomatoes are larger, ranging from six ounces up to a pound or more, typically rounded in shape or somewhat flattened (oblate). The meatier versions are referred to as beefsteaks. Slicers are good for your sandwiches.

Set your taste scales this way and judge your tomatoes based on:

Low Acid to High Acid Less Sugar to High Sugar

The following is from www.eu-sol.net:

“Simply put, the more acid a tomato has, the more sour it tastes and the more sugar it has, the sweeter. Tomatoes with little of both sugar and acid will taste bland. The type of sugar and acid in the tomato will affect the taste because some sugars taste sweeter than others and some acids taste more sour than others. Tomatoes have two main types of simple sugar, sucrose and fructose. Fructose is three times sweeter to our taste buds than sucrose even though they both have roughly the same caloric content. So the greater the ratio of fructose to sucrose the sweeter the tomato will taste. Similarly, tomatoes contain two main types of acid, citric acid and malic acid. Although malic acid tastes 14 times more sour to us, it is citric acid that produces most of the sour taste in tomatoes as it is present in much greater quantities.”

Alex and Betsy Hitt of Peregrine Farm conducted a taste test of the 20 varieties of tomatoes that they grew in 2000. They ranked their tomatoes this way:

LOW ACID

Striped German
German Johnson
Yellow Pear
Early Pick
Sun Gold
Cherokee Purple
Nebraska Wedding
Big Beef
Azoychka
Green Zebra

HIGH ACID

LESS SUGAR

Big Beef
Green Zebra
Azoychka
German Johnson
Yellow Pear
Nebraska Wedding
Cherokee Purple
Early Pick
Sun Gold
Striped German

HIGH SUGAR

**Build your tomato tasting platter
to include a wide variety of tomato types.
Take the time to evaluate each tomato based on its
acid and sugar content. Can you tell the difference?
What other flavors do you detect?**

Here is a rudimentary “flavor” description of our 2008 Tomato Varieties

(the following seed catalogs were used as references)

Tomato Growers Supply Company, Gary Ibsen’s Tomato Fest, John Scheepers Kitchen Garden Seeds,
TastyTomatoes.net, RachelsSupply.com, Johnny’s Selected Seeds, Heirloomtomatoes.net

Make your own flavor notes!

Amelia – Fruit is firm and aromatic.
Aunt Ruby’s German Green – Sweet, refreshing, spicy. Excellent flavor.
Better Boy – Deep red, meaty.
Big Beef – Sweet, slightly acidic flavor.
Black Krim – Very richly flavored with just a hint of saltiness.
Black Zebra – Sweet, juicy, its flavor carries the rich complexity associated with black tomatoes.
Brandywine – Exceptionally rich tasting with a hint of spice.
Carolina Gold – Firm, meaty flesh. Sweet, mild flavor.
Cascade – Tart, fruity kind of flavor.
Celebrity – Exceptionally flavorful fruit.
(Sweet) Chelsea Cherry – Very sweet with a nice balance of sweetness and acidity.
Cherokee Chocolate – Excellent flavor associated with Cherokee Purple, and beautiful large fruit.
Cherokee Purple – Pleasantly sweet and rich flavor.
Cherries –
Copia – Firm and juicy with a perfect acid-sweetness balance.
Early Girl – Fresh, sweet flavor. Rich tomato taste.
Enchantment – Tart-sweet taste. Pleasing firm texture. Good for fresh salsa!
First Lady – Very flavorful.
Garden Peach – Fruit-like flavor, very mild and sweet.
Georgia Stripe –
German Johnson – Excellent flavor and texture.
Green Zebra – Mild with a hint of lemony tartness.
Heirloom Cherries –
Italian Ice – Sugary sweet, bursting with juicy flavor.
Japanese Black Trifele – Wonderful flavor with extraordinary richness.
Jetsetter – “Real tomato” flavor. Juicy.
Juliet – Sweet little gem from China. Moderately thick flesh, good for sautéing.
Kellogg’s Breakfast – Very meaty with excellent taste.
Lemon Boy – Mild and sweet yet tangy and definitely not bland.
Little Cherokee – Complex flavor.
Matt’s Wild Cherry – Good taste. Delicious as “heaven”.
Mixed Cherries –
Mortgage Lifter – Superbly flavored with a beefsteak texture.
Mountain Delight – Firm and flavorful.
Mountain Gold – Sweet, mild flavor with just a little bite to it. A very pleasant taste.
Mountain Spring – Mild flavor, firm texture that softens with ripening.
New Girl – Excellent flavor.
Orange Blossom – Mildly flavored balanced with a little acidity.
Park’s Whopper – Big and juicy.
Pink Beauty – Firm, delicious, full, rich tomato flavor.
Pink Girl – Very pleasant taste with just the right amount of sweetness.
Plause –
Plum Crimson – Very high in lycopene! Sweet.
Potato Leaf German Johnson – Meaty. Very sweet, flavorful.
Rave – Right amount of juice and flavor galore.
Razzleberry – Melts in your mouth. Juicy and sweet.
Red Zebra – Zesty with a hint of sweetness.
Roma – Superior flavor and aroma.
Santa – Sweet. Kids love them.
Striped German Johnson – Great tomato flavor.
Striped Zebra –
Sun Gold – Uniquely rich, sugary with a hint of tropical fruit.
Sunsugar – Super sweet.
Taxi – Mild, non-acid tomato.
Tomande – Very juicy and lost of old-fashioned tomato flavor.
Tomato Berry – Eats like candy.
Trust – Sweet, but tart too.
Whopper – Succulent tomato flavor.