

Choose the Right Tomato for YOUR Garden

There literally are 1000s of varieties of tomatoes! A few guidelines will help **YOU** choose which type is right for your garden space. All tomatoes will do best with a protective cover to keep them warm, even in the East County. Most will do well in a greenhouse, some are bred for those conditions. Small fruited, cherry and grape tomatoes are likely to ripen earlier than large slicers. Always choose the fewest number of days to maturity. That information should be on the plant label, or the seed packet. Allow another 15-20 days for our cool coastal climate.

Understanding the '**growth habit**' of tomatoes can help you choose which type is best for you. **Determinate (DET)** varieties, commonly referred to as '**bush**', are short plants that set a crop, stop producing flowers and ripen the fruit. Many have excellent flavor, are very productive, and most should fit in a **large** tomato cage. **Indeterminate (IND)** types are tall plants that continue growing upwards and setting fruit until frost. This type should be staked and caged, or tied up on a trellis. Most (not all) heirloom varieties are **IND**. Some varieties may be described as **short-IND**, or **semi-DET**, these are mid sized plants. There are **Dwarf** varieties, and others that are bred specifically for small containers or hanging baskets.

Hybrid tomatoes (HYB) are crosses of two or more varieties. These are bred for specific attributes such as superior flavor or disease resistance, and are likely to be more vigorous and productive than either parent. **Heirloom** varieties have been handed down by families for generations. Some folks consider them to be superior in flavor to hybrids, some are famously delicious, however they have no disease resistance and may be less productive than hybrids. **Open Pollinated (OP)** varieties have been grown out over several seasons until the seeds are stabilized and will grow true to type from saved seeds. There are now many interesting new types including the 'Artisan' and 'Heirloom Marriage' series, and others such as the 'Bumble Bee' and 'Indigo' series. These crosses frequently start with heirlooms and use traditional breeding methods. Parents are chosen for particular qualities, such as interesting color combinations, shapes and flavors.

Tomatoes come in a huge variety of sizes, shapes, colors and flavor profiles. To help you choose one, first think about what you want in a tomato while considering the location of your garden. If you rarely use slicing tomatoes, but you buy cherry tomatoes and snack on vegetables, perhaps a cherry or grape tomato would be perfect. If you love BLTs, choose a slicer that will grow well in your micro-climate. There is **NO CORRELATION** between the size of the fruit and the size of the plant!

Success with tomatoes depends on choosing the right variety, but it also depends on **protection** from wind, rain, and cold nights. **The sweetness and flavor of any tomato is largely dependent on how much sun and warmth the plant gets.** You can build protective covers to maximize the warmth and keep plants warm at night. The next most important thing is proper nutrition and adequate water. Keep them protected, warm and well fed, and you can grow tomatoes.

Sally Reill, LCMG

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