

Cherry Tomatoes



While Yuma County tomato acreage is relatively small, the production of tomato transplants within the county is a vital part of tomato production in other areas. More than 60 million tons of tomatoes are produced per year, 16 million tons more than the second most popular fruit, the banana. Apples are the third most popular (36 million tons), then oranges (34 million tons) and watermelons (22 million tons).

There are at least 10,000 varieties of tomatoes (from the small marble-sized cherry one to the Ponderosa, which can weigh over three pounds).

The jelly-like substance around the seeds contains the highest concentration of vitamin C.

The smallest cherry tomato variety is less than three-quarters of an inch in diameter. There are yellow and red varieties.

Botanically, tomatoes are actually a fruit. This is because, generally, a fruit is the edible part of the seed containing the seeds, while a vegetable is the edible stems, leaves, and plant roots. But in 1863 the Supreme Court ruled that tomatoes were to be considered vegetables.

The tomato is the world's most popular "fruit" (See the abovementioned); more than 60 million tons are produced each year. This is 16 million more tons than the banana, the second most popular. The third most popular are apples (36 million), then oranges (34 million), and watermelons (22 million).

The early American colonists regarded the tomato as poison because it's related to the deadly nightshade plant (but so is the potato!). Colonel Robert Gibbon Johnson stood on the steps of the Salem, New Jersey courthouse in 1820 and ate a tomato-and then a few more-without any adverse effects, to the town's amazement.

Lycopene is the substance that gives tomatoes their rich red color. It's also an antioxidant that reduces the risk for prostate cancer in men and helps reduce heart disease

Wild cherry tomatoes are the grandmothers of most tomato varieties we enjoy today. Native to the South American Andes, they traveled north through Central America to Mexico, where they were domesticated and cultivated before the arrival of Columbus. In the 16th century, Spanish conquistadors returned from Mexico with the seeds of small-fruited tomatoes, as well as those of larger, irregularly lobed cultivars.

In general, the smaller the tomato variety (such as cherry tomatoes), the hotter the temperature it will tolerate. This makes cherry tomatoes a great choice for use the hotter areas like Arizona and the many of the Southwestern states. For some areas the fact that they will pollinate sooner and longer make them a great choice. Because of their small size, they don't develop blossom end rot as do other tomato varieties.

Most cherry tomato varieties are indeterminate tomatoes, which mean that the vine will keep growing larger as time goes on. This is a good thing from the standpoint of extending the harvest period.

According to Andrew F. Smith, author of *The Tomato in America*, many European varieties were derived from crosses between these different forms. A related species, the tiny-fruited currant tomato (*Lycopersicon pimpinellifolium*) is native to the western coastal areas of Peru and Ecuador, where it grows as a sprawling weed.

Because of its resistance to diseases like *fusarium* and bacterial wilt, as well as its habit of producing fruit in long trusses, the currant tomato has been cross-bred with other tomatoes, producing many modern cherry tomato varieties.

The cherry tomato is regarded as a botanical variety of the cultivated tomato. It was widely cultivated in Central America when the Conquistadores arrived and is thought to be the ancestor of all cultivated tomatoes. The most popular varieties today were developed in Israel.

Tomatoes that are allowed to ripen fully on the vine will have the fullest, best flavor. For best flavor, do not refrigerate tomatoes. The cool temperatures of the refrigerator will diminish their flavor, and change their texture. Store cherry tomatoes at room temperature, and eat within a few days. If tomatoes are picked under-ripe, a quick way to encourage them to ripen up is to place them inside a paper bag for a couple of days. Tomatoes with a green blush will ripen. Avoid cherry tomatoes that are soft, wrinkled, or have broken skin or blotchy brown areas.

An average American eats an average of 80 pounds of tomatoes every year. Aside from being rich in vitamins C, A and K, tomatoes contain lycopene, a carotenoid with potent antioxidant and cancer-fighting properties. Lycopene protects cells from oxygen damage, fights colorectal, prostate, breast, endometrial, lung, and pancreatic cancers, and reduces your risk of heart disease. Studies have found that the synergy between phytonutrients and lycopene in tomatoes, rather than an isolated nutrient, is what's responsible for their benefits.

Cherry tomatoes are an heirloom tomato, which implies that they will grow true from seed. But there are a number of hybrids that grow as cherry tomato plants that are quite popular. The Sweet 100 or Sweet One Million varieties of cherry tomato will give a slightly smaller fruit than the heirloom cherry tomatoes. Other popular cherry size tomatoes are grape tomatoes. These aren't as sweet, but can be found in some other colors, some with a purple hue to them.

Cooked tomatoes are a more concentrated source of lycopene than raw ones, and lycopene is better absorbed when they're cooked with a little oil, making homemade tomato sauces an ideal source. And if you're a ketchup fan, listen up: even this condiment favorite is a good source of lycopene, particularly if you go organic (organic ketchup contains about three times as much lycopene as non-organic brands).

When the Spanish explorers brought back tomato seeds from South America, the plant was grown merely for ornament; it was known as the love apple. Though the fruit was described

as a salad ingredient before 1600, it was commonly regarded as poisonous, and only within the last century has it become recognized as a valuable food. Indeed, all parts of the plant but the fruit are toxic. It was reintroduced to the United States as a food plant around 1800 and now ranks third among our vegetable crops. It is very popular as a salad vegetable, yet three quarters of the crop is processed into juice, canned tomatoes,

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