

# TOMATO

## Joy



From delicate heirlooms to sweet cherry varieties, the distinct flavors of local tomatoes offer another reason to envy summertime in the River Towns.

By LYNNE S. GOLDMAN

**A**ny time someone from another part of the country teases you about the hot, humid Delaware Valley summers, just think of tomatoes and smile quietly. Real tomatoes, local tomatoes, available only in summer.

Supermarket tomatoes available year-round are so far removed from summer tomatoes that I won't even buy them. I also feel strongly that Caprese salad – that wonderful combination of juicy tomatoes, fresh mozzarella and just-picked basil – should never be on a menu when summer tomatoes aren't available. Why bother?

Part of the joy of seasonal tomatoes is the sheer diversity. Visit any farmers' market in the River Towns and you will find tomatoes of all shapes and colors. Local tomatoes differ in flavor, texture, and purpose. Consider these four broad categories and choose your tomatoes accordingly.



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**T**raditional red slicing tomatoes are great for burgers or sandwiches. They should hold together well when sliced, not be too watery and have a great tomato flavor. You want firm but solid red color all the way around. Too soft and your burger or sandwich will be messy. Too orange and the flavor and texture will disappoint.

Cherry tomatoes are another summer delight in our area. These sweet little morsels are great for salads, over pasta, roasting, or snacking. They should have a solid color all the way around and tight, shiny skins to indicate freshness. And they come in so many beautiful varieties and colors. My favorites, grown at Milk House Farm in Upper Makefield, are Sungold (orange), Pink Bumblebee (pink striped) and Cherry Bomb (red). But Milk House also grows more than a dozen varieties of cherry tomatoes.

Heirloom tomatoes are old varieties that have been passed down over generations for their flavor and vigor in the garden.

You rarely find them in the supermarket because they don't travel well, and they don't look perfect. These "ugly" tomatoes are softer, with natural splits and cracks throughout. They often have "green shoulders" even when ripe. They can be pink, white, yellow, orange, green, salmon, red, striped, purple, brown, and



### **Peach and Tomato Salad**

Serves 4-6

This colorful salad offers a unique marriage of ingredients, and tastes best when local peaches and tomatoes are in their prime, beginning in mid-July. 1 pound tomatoes, cored, cut into ½-inch-thick wedges halved crosswise

Salt, and pepper

3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil, plus extra for drizzling

2 tablespoons cider vinegar

½ teaspoon lemon zest, grated

1 tablespoon lemon juice

1 pound peaches, halved, pitted and cut into ½-inch thick wedges and wedges halved crosswise

1 shallot, sliced into thin rings

1/3 cup mint, torn

Combine tomatoes and ½ teaspoon salt in a bowl and toss. Transfer to a colander and let drain in sink for 30 minutes.

Whisk oil, vinegar, zest, juice, ½ teaspoon salt and ½ teaspoon pepper in a large bowl. Add peaches, shallot, and tomatoes. Toss gently. Season with salt, and pepper to taste. Garnish with mint and more olive oil, if desired.

anything in between. Red heirlooms tend to be higher in acid with a more traditional tomato flavor. Yellows, orange, whites, and greens are low acid and deep flavored. Pinks are right in the middle for acid and have great flavor. Purples and browns are mid-scale in acid with a slight smoky flavor.

Heirlooms are meant to be picked and eaten the same day. Choose three or four to slice up and place on a platter for everyone to sample, with some good salt sprinkled over. Your guests will be astonished. The stunning flavor of heirloom tomatoes will enhance any dish. Don't overcook these tomatoes; allow them to be the stars.

Plum tomatoes are usually red, egg-shaped, and with a thicker skin and flesh that cooks down to a thick sauce. San Marzano and Roma are most common, but Plum Regal is a new, larger variety that translates as less cutting in the kitchen. These tomatoes should have solid color all around and be slightly soft to indicate ripeness.

This summer, visit our local farmers' markets and get to know the incredible diversity of tomatoes in your own back

yard. Take a chance on an "ugly" one or a color that you've never seen before. You won't be disappointed. ☞

*Lynne S. Goldman is the creator of Bucks County Taste and a regular contributor to River Towns.*