

TOMATOES

In response to the gentleman who approached me at the Master Gardener table during the Madera Fair, and who asked me to print a list of recommended tomatoes, I will reply by saying, thank you! My desire to have an interactive column is beginning to be realized. Questions directed toward me or other Master Gardeners help me to generate ideas and lend direction to future columns. Questions allows me to know what readers want and propel me to examine specific topics for future columns.

To focus on the recommended tomatoes for the Central Valley and the foothills of Madera County, the University of California recommends choosing varieties bred for disease resistance.. This will increase the possibility of positive results. Fusarium (F) and Verticillium (V) wilt are common diseases that can destroy a whole tomato crop. Many varieties are resistant to these two diseases. Look for VF after the cultivar name, sometimes seen on the labels of plants or “starts” purchased at nurseries and department stores. This is an indication of resistance to the wilts. VFN means the plants are resistant to Verticillium, Fusarium, and nematodes; VFNT adds tobacco mosaic virus to the resistance list.

Zone “A” included the foothills of the Sierras. Zone “B” includes the Central Valley. Some of the very same tomato varieties are recommended for both the foothills and the lower valley. Some are not. The following information listed in the California Master Gardeners Handbook, is modified for this column.

Cherry Tomatoes: Cherry tomatoes have small cherry-sized fruit that are often used in salads. They grow in both zones. Plants of cherry tomatoes range from dwarf size to 7-footers. One standard cherry tomato plant is usually sufficient for a family, because they generally produce abundantly.

- Cherry Grande-(V, F,V) medium D plant, with large cherry fruit.
- Sweet Cherry-(F) large ID plant, with medium to large cherry fruit
- Sweet 100,-large, ID plant with clusters of small cherry fruit.
- Sungold- large ID plant with clustery, orange cherry fruit.

Container Varieties: Container varieties are adapted to both zones. Midget, patio, or dwarf tomato varieties have very compact vines and do best when grown in 5-gallon or larger containers or large hanging baskets. Some produce large fruit, but the fruit are often of poorer quality than fruit from standard-sized plants. Container varieties are usually short-lived, producing their crop quickly over a short period.

- Patio-(F); dwarf D plant with small to medium fruit.
- Better Bush- (F, N,V) compact, D plant with small to medium fruit.
- Small Fry-(F, N,V) compact D plant with small cherry fruit.
- Husky series- Zone A & B (F, N, V) medium ID plant, red-pink, gold, medium-small fruit, compact yet may need some staking or caging.

Standard Varieties

Many standard-sized tomato varieties are indeterminate or semi-determinate plants that require some type of support. D-means the plant grows to a certain height and has a bush appearance, indeterminate or ID- means that the vines can reach in excess of 8 feet and produce fruit indefinitely or until the first heavy frost. SD- semideterminate indicates the plant has qualities that can fit either category.

Listed are only 10 of the 17 recommended standard varieties.

- Ace Hybrid- Zones A & B (F, N, V) medium D plant, medium to large fruit.
- Better Boy- Zone A ((F,N,V) ID, large fruit,
- Big Pick- Zone A & B (AAS, F,N, TMV, V) large ID plant.
- Big Set-Zone A & B (F, N, V) medium SID plant.
- Bingo- Zone A (F, TMV, V) medium D plant with large fruit.
- Celebrity- Zone A & B (AAS,F,N, TMV,V) medium SD with large firm fruit.
- Champion- Zone A & B (F, N, TMV, V) large ID with large, attractive fruit.
Excellent winter crop in valley.
- Early Bush 76- Zone A & B (F,V) medium D plant, large fruit, best D for Zone A
- Early Girl- Zone A (V) Large ID small to medium fruit.
- Early Pick-Zone A & B

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