

Yavapai County Master Gardeners' Favorite Tomatoes

In the fall of 2023, we asked Master Gardeners to list their favorite, most reliable tomatoes. Eighteen people responded, mostly from the Prescott quad city areas. Their favorite varieties are listed on the next page. You will find a large selection to choose from both in size and color.

One type of tomato that is missing from the list is the large beefsteak tomato, the type that you see in catalogs cradled in two hands. These tomatoes take a long time to grow and ripen, and unfortunately the growing season in Yavapai County is surprisingly short. We have very low humidity, which results in a large daily range in temperatures, often as much as 50° from daytime high to the nighttime low. Tomatoes in general are not picky plants, but they are happiest when temperatures are between 65° and 80°. When temperatures get above 95° there is reduced fruit set, and when it drops into the 50s the plants noticeably slow down. This starts to happen in early September as the nights gets cooler. September is also the time when the larger tomatoes really start to ripen.

Generally, the best tomatoes to grow in our area are the cherry tomatoes or the smaller “slicing” tomatoes. These tomatoes have shorter growing seasons and can take advantage of our pleasant summers. Paste tomatoes, which are meatier and used for cooking and canning, also do very well in the area.

The list has the varieties listed as hybrid or “OP.” OP is short for Open Pollinated. If you save the seeds from open pollinated plants, they will produce fruit (tomatoes) similar to their parents. Most OP plants are also called heirlooms and have been available for decades. Hybrid variety seeds, also called F1 seeds (first generation of breeding) are the result of cross breeding two different varieties, and the seeds will not result in plants with fruit like the parent. Some hybrids, like the Roma tomato, have become genetically stable, so even though we know the variety is a hybrid that was developed by the USDA in the 1950's, it is now OP. Bottom line: if you want to save seeds, buy OP plants. If you buy plants every year, it doesn't matter which you choose.

Hybrid varieties have usually been bred for a resistance to disease, which is why the names often have letters like F, V, or N added. If you have had problems with fusarium wilt, verticillium wilt, or nematodes, these are varieties you should consider for your garden. The Roma tomato mentioned above is Roma VF, resistant (although not immune) to fusarium and verticillium wilt.

Gardening in Yavapai County is different every summer. Some years are great for tomatoes, some are not. Even if you only get a small handful of tomatoes, the flavor of fresh tomatoes from your garden is always worth it.

Debbie Allen
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CHERRY TOMATOES

Chadwick Cherry – red – OP – 1”

Larger cherry tomatoes, very reliable producer of tasty fruits with good tomato flavor

Chiapas Wild – red – OP – pea-sized

Ancient Mexican variety, abundant tiny fruits give a burst of flavor in salads

Honeycomb – gold – hybrid – ½ to 1”

“The best tasting cherry tomato we have run across”

King Umberto – red – OP – 2”

Impressed by its flavor and texture; like a small Roma but with tender skin

Large Red Cherry – red – OP – 1”

Large crop, long harvest, sweet flavor, cook well

Midnight Snack – purple/red – hybrid – 1 to 2”

Slow to start but prolific mid-August through October

Sungold – yellow – hybrid – 1”

Sweet, prolific producer July-October

Sweet 100 – red – hybrid – 1” (and similar Super Sweet 100)

Non-stop producer, rich sweet flavor

Yellow Pear – yellow – OP – 1 to 2”

Prolific producer

MEDIUM SIZE SLICING TOMATOES

Celebrity – red – hybrid – 4”

Flavorful, good for slicing, high yields, always my most dependable

Cherokee Purple – purple – OP – 6”

Good producer August-October

Chocolate Stripes – purple/dark green stripes – OP – 3 to 4”

Rich, sweet and earthy, prolific

Costoluto Genovese – red – OP – 6 to 7”

Good for cutting up or drying for sun-dried tomatoes

Early Girl – red – hybrid – 3 to 4”

Nice for slicing, long season, good flavor

Green Zebra – green – OP – 3”

Tasty tart flavor, excellent producer

Lemon Boy – yellow – hybrid – 3 to 4”

Very flavorful, good producer, low acid

Sarandipity Dwarf – red/purple stripes – OP – 2 to 3” (variety developed to be smaller size plants)

Starts early and produces through the season, good flavor

Stupice – red – OP – 2 to 3”

Reliable producer, good flavor, starts early and produces all summer

Tasmanian Chocolate Dwarf – purple – OP – 6” (variety developed to be smaller size plants)

Wonderful rich flavor, love them sliced or sun dried

PASTE TOMATOES (Meaty tomatoes for cooking or canning)

Big Mama – red – hybrid – 5”

Great flavor, huge, abundance of fruit

Prescott – red – OP – 2” (recently re-named Wickenburg-Prescott for its origins)

Abundant producer, does well in heat

Roma – red – hybrid – 3 to 5” (oblong)

Always a favorite, does well in our climate