



## Our Favorite Tomatoes

Choosing a tomato variety to grow out of the hundreds available is like picking a paint color. Each choice has its irresistible appeal, and there are just *so many* to choose from! But as with the “Pompeii Clay” hue you might have chosen for your dining room wall, you don’t have to live with your tomato pick forever. You can try another variety next year, and another the year after that.

Home Garden Seed Association members evaluate their tomato options every year—tasting, testing, and grading. When asked to name a favorite, these savvy growers may hesitate for just an instant before naming the one that has risen to the top spot in their 2017 list of favorites. In 2018, another seductive tomato may unseat it. And that’s just *one* of the things that makes gardening fun.

**Here are HGSA top tomato picks, in no particular order:**



Patty Buskirk, owner and chief breeder for a California-based wholesale seed company, was quick to respond. “My favorite—that’s easy. **Chef’s Choice Orange FI beefsteak tomato**. Even though this beefsteak is orange, the flavor is the best, and the intense color doesn’t fade with cooking. This AAS (All America Selections) winner matures in 75 days from transplanting, before many red hybrids. For a gorgeous, tasty slicing tomato look no further!”



Tracy Lee, Home Grown Product Manager at Sakata Seed, a large vegetable breeding company, chose a new variety for her favorite. “I taste hundreds of tomatoes in trials every year. Cherries and grapes are my favorites, but I find that sometimes they can be so sweet that they lose that real “tomato” flavor. Indeterminate cherry **Braveheart cherry tomato** is very sweet, with just enough acid to create the perfect balanced flavor. Also, Braveheart has skin that doesn’t crack but without being too thick. It matures in about 65 days and has great disease resistance.”



Judy Seaborn and her husband Curtis started Botanical Interests Seed Company, based in Colorado, in 1995, and the business continues to grow. “I participated in a tomato judging event one year with my 10-year-old daughter, two garden writers and a celebrity chef. We ended up tasting over 200 varieties! From that experience I *had* to add **Pineapple beefsteak tomato** to our line. The taste is amazing, the color is beautiful, and it’s perfect for slicing. The flavor is robust with hints of citrus, sweet but not overly so. I think there isn’t anything nicer than a plain, thick slice of Pineapple tomato.”



Ed Hume, of Ed Hume Seeds, a family owned business in the Pacific NW since 1977, chose a perennial taste-test winner. “Our favorite is an heirloom that’s known for its rich taste: **Cherokee Purple tomato**, a large flattened globe shaped tomato, purplish-pink and brown in color. The flavor is sweet and slightly smoky. It matures moderately early—about 80 days from transplanting—compared to other colorful heirlooms in the test garden. It’s easy to grow and provides a good yield. Washington’s First Lady grows it in her pea-patch garden too, and it’s one of their favorites as well!”



Andrea Tursini is Director of Sales at High Mowing Organic Seeds, a thriving business in Burlington, Vermont where you can find many of the varieties featured in its catalog growing on the company's 40 acres. She speaks from a gardener's perspective. "I'm really excited about **Damsel FI tomato** because it has late blight disease resistance (among other resistances) plus it has the flavor of an heirloom. I've lost a lot of tomatoes in my garden to late blight in recent years and being able to have something perform well and taste great is a total delight."



Mike Mullally, Director of Marketing at Grimes horticultural supply company based in Ohio with roots going back nearly 100 years, chose a kitchen classic. "My favorite tomato has to be the **Amish Paste tomato**. I'm a huge fan of red sauces for pasta, pizza, and everything else! This sauce tomato has deep red thick flesh with few seeds." Many gardeners consider this the ultimate paste tomato.



Doug Rohrer heads up Rohrer Seeds, a fourth generation wholesale and retail seed company located in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. For his top big tomato he seconded Chef's Choice Orange beefsteak. He also endorsed a bite-sized variety. "I love **Sweet Hearts grape tomato**. It's very sweet and much more crack resistant than typical cherry tomatoes. The elongated oval fruits have brilliant red color and excellent flavor and texture. The disease-resistant, indeterminate plants produce early (about 60 days) impressive yields with full clusters of excellent quality fruit."



Renee Shepherd, an innovator in introducing international vegetables, flowers and herbs to home gardeners, grows each of her selections in trial gardens, not just at the Renee's Garden headquarters in California but in other regions as well. Her choice for top flavor: "**Crimson Carmello tomato** was bred in France especially for fresh eating. The round red juicy fruits have the perfect sweet to acid balance that translates to fabulous flavor, fresh from the garden or in pasta dishes. Big 4 to 5 inch fruits are borne in abundance on vigorous disease resistant and widely adapted indeterminate vines."



Venelin Dimitrov is Senior Product Manager for Vegetables, Herbs & Fruits at W. Atlee Burpee, a company that has had a long-time relationship with the tomato. Based in eastern Pennsylvania, his choice for favorite tomato was a juicy beefsteak. "**Madame Marmande hybrid tomato** is gourmet tomato with a French accent. It's a culinary star in France, where a favorite instant feast is a scooped-out Marmande brimming with a mild cheese. The hefty, broad-shouldered 10 oz. fruits are scarlet and light-ruby, loaded with rich flavor, and they won't crack like other Marmande varieties have a tendency to do. Extraordinaire!"



Tom and Julie Johns own Territorial Seed Company in Cottage Grove, Oregon, a region in the maritime Northwest that is not ideal for all tomato varieties. They make a point of seeking out and testing types that grow well in their mild summers. For his favorite, Tom chose a classic. "**San Marzano Roma tomato** ranks among the richest roma types we've trialed. It's very early, with high fruit production for canning and salsa making, and does great in all regions. Importantly for us, it's reliable for Northern gardens. It's as trusty as a 1975 FJ40, and as pleasing to the eye as a full woodshed!"



Robb Baumann and co-owner Lance Heaton took over the operations of Mountain Valley Seed Company in Salt Lake City, Utah in 2010. They've brought their unique brand of energy to the venture, sponsoring an annual "Pumpkin Regatta," an event that features intrepid rowers propelling huge pumpkins across a pond. "**Hamson tomato** is one of my favorites because I live in the city and have limited garden space. The Hamson is just a great all around tomato. It is meaty with decent but not overwhelming acidity. It makes a great fresh slicer, cans and bottles well and has enough structure to hold up in a good sauce."



Aaron Whaley is president of A. P. Whaley Seed Company, a family operation based in western Wisconsin. He and his staff breed and select high-performing vegetable varieties on the company's 175-acre Wisconsin farm. "We vote for our new release from Oregon State University's high flavonoid breeding program, **Indigo Pear Drops**. Everyone loves pear tomatoes and this one has great flavor, storage and productivity, and the 1-inch fruits have a pretty Indigo blush on the shoulders. The fruits draw their color from the wild tomatoes found in the Galapagos Islands and Peru. Plants are indeterminate, and the fruits mature early, 65 days from transplanting."

Sources: To shop for these tomatoes and other vegetable seeds, visit the "Shop Our Members Online" page at <http://ezfromseed.org/>