

However you say tomato, 'tis the season to eat them

By Alexandra Sifferlin

CONSIDER THE TOMATO: EASY TO grow, healthy to eat, tasty in just about any recipe and pleasant to look at. And come late summer, in steady supply. Though you can find a stalwart plum variety in produce bins during the coldest winter months, August is the tomato's season to shine. Farmers' markets and grocery stores are bursting with lesser-known but arguably more-flavorful varieties, including punch-colored cherries and big-mac heirlooms.

"Heirlooms ripened on the vine are the tastiest of all tomatoes," says Amy Goldman Fowler, author of *The Heirloom Tomato*. "I think their beauty is more than skin-deep." Heirloom seeds have been around for at least 50 years, often passed down from generation to generation. You may hear *cherry* or *heirloom* used to describe a tomato at hand, but classifications are niche, and growers have fun giving catchy names to varieties: Mortgage Lifters. Beefsteaks. Oxhearts. Early Girls.

And all of them come with health benefits. Tomatoes are a good source of the antioxidant lycopene, which is thought to help lower a person's risk for heart problems and cancer. Tomatoes also contain healthy doses of vitamins A and C. For the best fruit (they're fruits, not vegetables), choose tomatoes with shiny, firm skin and a little give, and store them at room temperature away from direct sunlight. Keep them out of the fridge, since cold temperatures can affect texture and flavor.

"They satisfy something more than just taste," says Fowler. "Tomatoes feed your soul."

Eat up!



1. SUN GOLD

Sweeter than its red peers, this cherry is packed with flavor and hardy enough to grow in hot or cold climates, across several months.

2. PURPLE BUMBLE BEE

This type of cherry tomato has light striping and a firm skin that helps it withstand cool nights and hot days.

3. GREEN ZEBRA

The name says it all: this wild-looking heirloom variety is known for its colorful skin, with stripes of green and a yellow blush.

4. BRANDYWINE

The heavyweight of the heirloom family can clock in at a pound or more and comes in unlikely hues, including pink and black.

5. CHEROKEE PURPLE

Craig LeHoullier, author of *Epic Tomatoes*, has called this heirloom "ugly," but it is known for its rich flavor.