



Tomatoes

DID YOU KNOW?

Spanish explorers brought tomato seeds to Europe in the early 1500's. At that time, most Europeans thought tomatoes were toxic, and would not even taste them. Italians were the first Europeans to use tomatoes as a key ingredient in their cooking.



ORIGINS

Tomatoes are native to the Andes Mountains in South America.

By the time the Spanish arrived in Mexico, the native Mexicans were growing and eating tomatoes. The name "tomato" comes from the Mexican word "tomatl."



CLASSIFYING TOMATOES

FAMILY

Solanaceae
(Nightshade family)

There are about 3,000 species in this family.



This family includes many poisonous species, such as deadly nightshade, as well as many edible species.



GENUS

Lycopersicon
In Greek this means "wolf peach."



This wild tomato relative is one of several species in this genus found in Ecuador and Peru.

Scientists gave tomatoes this genus name at the time when most people thought they were poisonous.

SPECIES

esculentum
means "something that can be eaten."

Scientists gave tomatoes this species name after people realized that they were not poisonous.



THE TOMATO PLANT

There are more varieties of tomato than of any other vegetable.

Some varieties are bushy, with fruit produced at the tips of branches. Other varieties are more like vines. The fruits come in many shapes, sizes, and colors.



The small flowers are yellow.



The compound leaves are divided into a number of leaflets.



GROWING AND HARVESTING TOMATOES

Tomatoes thrive in full sun in well drained, fertile soil. Set out transplants one week after the last frost date. Most varieties need to be supported by stakes or cages. Keep well watered. Once fruits begin to ripen, pick them daily.

These cages support my tomato plants so they don't get knocked down by the wind.



USES

Most tomato varieties can be used for both fresh eating and cooking. However, Italian paste tomatoes are best for cooking into sauces. Large beefsteaks are good for slicing.



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