If you like tomatoes in salads, soup and sandwiches, then September is your month. Organic heirloom tomatoes provide a whole new taste sensation, which just might change the way you think about tomatoes.

**Heirloom Tomatoes** have become more common and available to consumers the past few years are now winning lots of fans. And now that they have had a chance to soak up lots of summer heat this is the perfect time to give them a try.

As you are searching through the pile of colored beauties you may be asking yourself what is an heirloom? According to the tomato fest website www.tomatofest.com, “An heirloom is generally considered to be a variety that has been passed down through several generations of a family because of its valued characteristics. Heirloom tomato experts Craig LeHoullier and Carolyn Male, Ph.D., have classified heirlooms into four categories:

1. **Commercial Heirlooms:** Open-pollinated varieties introduced before 1940.

2. **Family Heirlooms:** Seeds that have been passed down for several generations through a family. Numerous stories from Ellis Island included Italian immigrants who came to America with only the smallest reminders of home on their back also made sure they brought seeds from their favorite tomato variety in the lining of their coat or pants pocket.

3. **Created Heirlooms:** Crossing two known parents (either two heirlooms or an heirloom and a hybrid) and de-hybridizing the resulting seeds for how ever many years/generations it takes to eliminate the undesirable characteristics and stabilize the desired characteristics, perhaps as many as eight years or more.

4. **Mystery Heirlooms:** Varieties that are a product of natural cross-pollination of other heirloom varieties.

(Note: All heirloom varieties are open-pollinated but not all open-pollinated varieties are heirloom varieties.)

One of the first things you’ll notice with heirlooms is their amazing diversity of flavors, shapes, and sizes. These tomatoes have origins found in every part of the globe and interesting names to go along with them. Here are just a few of the myriad number of varieties from around the world that we can enjoy:

One of my favorites is the Black Krim. From Russia, it has a sweet smoky flavor that is out of this world. They are a very dark reddish-brown color with green shoulders, which may not sound very
appetizing, but it is absolutely beautiful when sliced.

The Stupice is a native of the Czech Republic and its small fruits are jam-packed with flavor!

Then there is the dark deep red tomato known as Costoluto Genovese, which is a favorite Old Italian heirloom.

If you are a person who can make a meal from tomato slices and two pieces of bread, the Polish Giant will make you happy with its mild flavor and big fruit. Some of these can weigh up to a pound and a half. And if that’s not enough for a few tomato sandwiches I don’t know what is.

The Druzba comes from Bulgaria. This fruit has a great acidic flavor and is great for canning.

The Omar’s Lebanese have a richly flavored, meaty, red tomato originated from a small town in Lebanon.

Jaune Flammee from France is orange colored and has a refreshing sort of tangy flavor.

You could try a different tomato every day in September and still just barely scratch the surface. Get started now and you’ll knowledgeable enough to impress your friends for National Tomato Month in October.


WE DON’T LIVE BY TOMATOES ALONE

Organic Sugar Snap and Snow Peas can be a wonderful snack or dinner side when it’s hot and you want something tasty but light. How do the two differ? Snap Peas are a combination of English Peas and Snow Peas and contain the best traits of both. They have crisp, tender, shiny pods that enclose plump, round peas. Sugar Snap Peas are string-less, making them easy to prepare. Since there is no need to remove ends or strings, simply rinse before using. These edible pod peas are sweet and can be enjoyed raw or cooked by boiling, microwaving, steaming or stir-frying, then topping with butter or soy sauce. Sugar Snap Peas are entirely edible.

What about Snow Peas? No, they do not grow in the high Sierras, but they do grow in lots of places such as Asia where it is a popular and versatile vegetable. The Snow Pea is a frost-hardy, cool-season vegetable that can be grown throughout most of the United States.

Favored for its crisp and sweet pod more than its tiny peas, the flat shape of the Snow Pea makes it easy to distinguish from other edible pea pods (like the Sugar Snap Pea). Because it is sweeter and less starchy than the green pea, the Snow Pea is often enjoyed raw. Perfect for a quick stir-fry or blanched and tossed in salads, the Snow Pea goes well with a variety of mushrooms, especially shitakes, and is excellent in many Asian cuisine dishes.”

Peas are a good source of protein, iron and insoluble fiber. Sugar Snap Peas contain much less protein but they are an excellent source of iron and vitamin C that keeps your immune system functioning properly. Tasty, good, and sweet, that’s an autumn treat.

While you’re savoring an heirloom or snacking on your favorite pea, browse to see what other cool things your produce department has to offer this Indian summer.

© 2009-2011 Organic Options

Ask Dr. Patty Produce

Q: Hello Patty, My tomatoes don’t seem to hold when I get them home. What’s up with that? Emma Kendall

A: Dear Emma, Let’s look at a couple of things. They are best stored at 60 to 75 degrees Fahrenheit. Never refrigerate or store below 50 degrees; this diminishes the flavor. When selecting tomatoes, choose firm fruit with a fresh green calyx on the top as tomatoes with the calyx last longer. Try these and you should have better luck.