



Table of Contents

Introduction.....3

Meet Four Successful Growers.....7

 Selling Tomatoes On eBay8

 Growing Heirloom Tomatoes In Montana9

 Obsessed With Heirloom Tomatoes9

Chapter 1.....10

 Best Varieties For Market Growers10

 What Is An Heirloom Tomato?.....11

Chapter 2.....26

 Tomato Growing Requirements.....26

 Why Compost?.....27

Chapter 3.....30

 Heirloom Tomato Production.....30

 Growing Heirloom Tomatoes In A Hoophouse47



Chapter 4.....50

 Value-Added Tomato Products.....50

 Value-Added Food Products52

Chapter 5.....54

 Marketing Heirloom Tomatoes54

Chapter 6.....68

 Resources For Tomato Growers68

 Secrets Of Successful Growers.....78

 When Is The Best Time To Start?.....78

 Specialty Crop Guides.....79



Introduction

Black Prince ... Cherokee Purple ... Brandywine. These are just three of the most popular heirloom tomato varieties prized by growers and tomato lovers alike, as they are almost impossible to find in a supermarket, yet taste far better than any store-bought tomato.

Heirloom tomatoes are easy to spot, as they look a little old-fashioned, often less than perfect, and some varieties are just plain ugly! Most heirlooms have unusual shapes or colors, with wrinkles and blemishes not allowed in most produce aisles. But once you've tasted the wonderful range of flavors produced by these tasty tomatoes, you'll be hooked, and never want to eat a supermarket tomato again.

For market growers, heirloom tomatoes can bring big profits and customers for life. Most supermarket tomatoes sell for around \$2 per pound, but heirlooms can bring as much as \$6. Even at these high prices, heirlooms are eagerly sought after by tomato lovers. Mark Wilson, a produce specialist at Whole Foods, says heirloom tomatoes are their #1-selling produce item. Other market growers report the demand for their heirlooms is growing every year. Raul Gallegos of Bristol Farms says sales have quadrupled in the last five years.

What's driving this wave of popularity? Consumers and restaurant patrons are attracted to the novelty of heirlooms, with shapes and textures totally unlike anything they have ever seen. Another part of heirloom tomato popularity, perhaps the most important, is the taste and flavor.





Profitable Heirloom Tomatoes



Unlike most common varieties bred for a long shelf life and to hold up well in shipping, often as much as 1,500 miles from field to market, heirloom tomatoes taste great, with a range of flavors broad enough to tantalize the taste buds of any gourmet. The Brandywine heirloom tomato variety, for example, has a reputation as the world's best-tasting tomato, but would never survive long-distance shipping or mechanical sorting.

For market growers, the best quality of heirloom tomatoes is the premium prices they bring when sold to consumers eager to purchase a tomato that actually tastes good! In fact, when growers offer samples to visitors at the farmers market, the most common reaction is "I never knew a tomato could taste this good!"

A recent survey of market growers who sell heirloom tomatoes, both retail at farmers markets or direct to consumers from their garden, and those who sell to restaurants who use local produce found consistent premium prices for the heirloom varieties. The survey results were very encouraging, as prices of heirlooms brought a substantial premium over conventional "commodity" tomatoes. Prospective growers should be aware though, that heirloom tomatoes can be less reliable and have lower yields than hybrid tomato varieties.

Price premiums for heirloom tomato varieties averaged 115%, or over double the prices of ordinary tomatoes. The more "exotic" heirloom varieties – those with unusual color, texture, shape or flavor, brought the highest premiums, as much as triple the prices of conventional tomato varieties. Heirloom varieties which appear to be similar to supermarket tomatoes, of course, bring a smaller premium, or markup.

If you're growing for market now, or thinking about getting started, you really should consider growing heirloom tomatoes. After all, if you can grow great tasting tomatoes and charge double the prices of conventional tomato varieties, why would you want to grow anything else? You could find yourself in the enviable position of a vendor at our local farmers market, who had to restrict heirloom tomato sales to 6 per customer to make sure everyone could enjoy some before she sold out.



To ensure a continuous harvest throughout the season, start new plants every week, and use the best varieties for the season. For example, the first seedlings started should be the early varieties, such as Green Vernissage, Black Cherry, Koralik, Moskvich and Sasha's Altai. These Russian heirloom varieties will produce a crop, and profits, earlier than most mid and late season varieties, giving you a competitive advantage. After early varieties have been planted, start later season varieties so you have new varieties to sell every week during the harvest season.

New market growers find a small number of varieties easier to manage the first year or two, such as four early season varieties, four mid-season varieties and four late season varieties. At the end of the first growing season, save seeds from the best/most productive plants for next year's crop. This will help ensure the plants you grow each year are well-suited for your specific growing conditions and microclimate.

After a couple of years, you'll have a better sense of what works and what doesn't in your own tomato patch, and be better prepared to expand your selection of heirloom varieties.

Seed Starting With Soil Blocks

Market growers need to use the best and most cost-effective methods, which is why the seed starting method of choice for most is soil blocks. For those of you who have not used soil blocks before, these are small cubes of a blended growing medium you mix yourself, that need no containers, such as plastic or peat pots, for support. Because you can blend your own soil block mix, you avoid the higher cost of expensive pre-blended mix and can adjust the blend and the nutrients in it, to suit your specific requirements. Here's how the system works:

