



BOB CROSLIN / AURORA SELECT

French's Mustard yellow and lime green, and shaped like pickles. After an hour or so, I was experiencing what the experts call taste fatigue. And I was getting a stomachache.

Ibsen had named Clint Eastwood's Rowdy Red after his friend, the actor-director and former Carmel mayor. "It's a very sweet tomato," Ibsen said. A panel of vintners and chefs voted as its favorite the Paul Robeson—a large blackish purple beefsteak tomato named after the African-American singer and actor. But for me and several others, the champ was the small, leathery-looking Speckled Peach, a German-bred tomato that packs a wallop

Florida is the nation's No. 1 source of fresh-market tomatoes (grape tomatoes at a DiMare Inc. farm in Apollo Beach), boasting a \$464 million crop in 2007.

of tang and sweetness. "It reminds me of fruit," said Hannah Grogin, age 9, of Pebble Beach. Regina Greel, a hospital employee from Berkeley, said, "They taste melony, like peaches, but fruity, not tomato-y. Like a combination of a cantaloupe and a peach." Eureka, I thought: the perfect tomato.

Florida is the biggest supplier of winter fresh tomatoes for U.S. consumers, though Canada, where they're grown in greenhouses in the spring and winter, and Mexico are cutting into the Sunshine State's market. Tomato-growing in Florida is a tough business, because of, among other things, high humidity and frequent storms, which can wreak microbial havoc. "We see more diseases in a season than they do in California in a year," one expert says.