



Matter
of Taste

A Slice of Summer

When the warm wind blows and the vine ripens, it's time to fete tomatoes.

IN THE EARLY '90s, GENETIC ENGINEERS FOCUSED THEIR MICROSCOPES ON THE TOMATO (a beloved symbol of summer). They dubbed their modified marvel the Flavr Savr, a catchy name, but alas, tasteless. With no flavor in the Flavr Savr, its real life (if not its shelf life) was short and the tomato was permanently canned. Enter the **heirloom**, in every way the antithesis of its genetically modified cousin. "With heirlooms, it's all about the flavor," says Gary Ibsen, director of Carmel, California's venerable **NatureSweet TomatoFest**, now in its 16th year. Instead of creating something new like a mutant, square-shaped tomato that's easy to package, Ibsen wanted to save something old. Something that tasted great and had unique "flavor profiles," "big shoulders," multicolored stripes, and funny-looking creases (not to mention bumps and lumps). As an homage to the heirloom, TomatoFest was born. With 350 varieties cubed and toothpick-ready, TomatoFest is to food and gardening aficionados what Disneyland is to kids (**festival proceeds go to children's charities**). More

Gary Ibsen encourages everyone to enjoy tomatoes. "Grow your own tomatoes," he says to the kids. "Treat them like pets."

than 100 chefs and wineries will line up this September waiting to give you a sample of something delicious, such as **tomato sushi or sun dried-tomato cotton candy** paired with a tasty, tomato-free beverage. More than likely you'll leave with some seeds. The Johnny Appleseed of tomatoes, Ibsen has collected (and planted) heirlooms from China, Bulgaria, India, Vietnam, and more—Brandywines and Green Zebras, Purple Calabashes and Boxcar Willies. His mission is to spread tomato seeds, and heirloom appreciation, far and wide. ■—Sara Settegast Hare

Tomato Time

Tomato festivals have sprouted up all over.

California / Kendall-Jackson Heirloom Tomato Festival: Behind Kendall-Jackson Winery.

Fulton; Tel: 866-287-9818 or kj.com; September 8
NatureSweet

TomatoFest: At the Quail Lodge Resort, this event features leading chefs and wineries. Carmel; Tel: 831-625-6041 or tomatofest.com; September 16

North Dakota

Great Tomato Festival: Picnic and Dixieland jazz. Minot; Tel: 701-857-7620 or visitminot.org; August 15



Pennsylvania

Pittston Tomato Festival: The U.S. version of Spain's infamous tomato fight, La Tomatina. Tel: 570-655-1424 or pittstontomato festival.com; August 17-20

Spain / La Tomatina: Last Wednesday of August in a small Valencia town. Locals fire tomatoes from rockets into the streets. Buñol; Tel: 34-963-986-422

North Carolina

Tomato Tasting: Garden-fresh tomatoes from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the WNC Farmers Market. Asheville; Tel: 919-733-4216 or ncagr.com/events; August 17