

CELEBRATE THE TOMATO HARVEST

Here's a sampling of some of the many regional tomato festivals scheduled for the remainder of this harvest season. Look for the one nearest you and join in the celebration of this all-American favorite.



JULY

24 The 7th annual Shockoe Tomato Festival, 17th and Main Street, Richmond, Virginia. Contact the Farmers Market at (804) 646-0477 or visit www.17thstreetfarmersmarket.com.

23–25 The 12th annual Grainger County Tomato Festival, Rutledge, Tennessee. Call (865) 828-3433 or visit www.graingercountytomatofestival.com.

AUGUST

4 The Fairfield Tomato Festival, Texas St., Fairfield, California. Contact the Fairfield Downtown Association at (707) 422-0103 or visit www.fairfielddowntown.com.

7 Thomas Jefferson's Tomato Faire, Lynchburg, Virginia. Contact the Hill County Master Gardeners at (434) 847-1585.

11 The 16th annual Great Tomato Festival, Minot, North Dakota. Contact Jerry Kaup at (701) 852-1045 or e-mail him at jkaup@ndak.net.

21 International Tomato Festival, downtown, Yuba City, California. Contact Coolidge Public Relations at (530) 671-9600 or visit www.tomatofestival.net.

21–24 The 21st Annual Pittston Tomato Festival, Pittston, Pennsylvania. Contact Lori Nocito at (570) 823-2101 ext. 136 or the Greater Pittston Chamber of Commerce at (570) 655-1424 or visit www.pittston.com.

SEPTEMBER

8–12 The 39th Annual Reynoldsburg Tomato Festival, "Tomatoes Galore in 2004," Reynoldsburg, Ohio. Call (614) TOMATO (866-2861) or e-mail tomatofestival@aol.com or visit www.reynoldsburgtomatofestival.org.

11 The 8th Annual Kendall-Jackson Heirloom Tomato Festival, Kendall-Jackson Wine Center, Fulton, California. Contact the Kendall-Jackson Wine Center at (701) 571-8100 or visit www.kj.com.

12 The 13th Annual Carmel TomatoFest, Quail Lodge Resort, Carmel Valley, California. Call (888) 989-8171 or visit www.tomatofest.com.

OCTOBER

23 & 24 The 3rd Annual Green Tomato Festival, Juliette, Georgia. Contact the Honeysuckle Café at (478) 974-0716 or visit www.juliettega.com.

development of the Paragon tomato, the nation's first commercial tomato.

"We take our tomatoes pretty serious here," says Mayor Bob McPherson, known affectionately as "The Head Tomato" by his wife. "People in Reynoldsburg are proud that this is the place where it all started. Without Alexander Livingston and the Paragon tomato, we don't know how many years it would have been before Americans had an edible tomato."

Besides the crowning of a Tomato King and Queen, Tomato Prince, and Princess, and the Senior Tomato King and Queen, the five-day Reynoldsburg festival features a tomato contest, exhibits, and sales, free tomato juice for refreshment, live entertainment, rides, arts and crafts, a car cruise-in, and a grand parade.

Not too far from the festivities sits the original Livingston house—a beautifully restored circa 1800 frame house complemented by period flower, herb, and vegetable gardens—that is now a museum. Last year, the house, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, was awarded a historical marker by the State of Ohio Bicentennial Commission and the Longaberger Legacy Initiative.

No matter what anyone else might say, many people in Reynoldsburg hold strong to the belief that their town is the real deal with respect to tomatoes. "Everyone's looking to cash in on celebrity status, but only Reynoldsburg is the birthplace of the tomato," McPherson says.

Gary Ibsen personally tends not to get swept up in the competitive hoopla, but he feels it's perfectly fine for others to tout their tomato titles. "Whatever the reason people are shouting about tomatoes, it's great," he says. "All these celebrations play important roles."

So while Reynoldsburg, Pittston, Carmel, and other cities may dispute the title of tomato capital of America, one thing is certain: Americans are still crazy about their tomatoes. Through friendly civic rivalry—and the pride of backyard tomato growers everywhere—we know that tomato mania in this country is happily alive and well and will carry on for years to come.

Daphne Rozen is a free-lance writer based in Houston, Texas.