A Slice of Summer
When the warm wind blows and the vine ripens, it's time to freshen 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 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. ✨—Sant Settegast Hare

---

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

Spain / La Tomatina: Last Wednesday of August in a small Valencia town. Locals fire tomatoes from rockets into the streets. Buróf, Tel: 34-963-966-422

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