

TOMATO TALK

Sponsored by the Rochester
Public Library Seed Library

August 18, 2021





AGENDA FOR AUGUST:

- Hybrid vs. Open Pollinated Varieties
- Topping: What, Why, and When
- End of Season Harvesting
- Saving Tomato Seeds

HYBRID VARIETIES

- Hybrid plants are the result of the intentional cross-pollination of two different parent varieties.
- Hybridization is used to breed in disease resistance and other traits.
- Seeds saved from the fruit of hybrid plants will NOT produce a plant identical to the parent. The resulting plants will have unpredictable shapes, sizes, flavors and other traits which makes saving seeds from hybrids a gamble.
- The Federal Seed Act requires that all hybrid seeds be labeled as hybrids or F1.
- Many, but not all, determinate tomatoes are hybrids.



Hybrid: Sun Gold

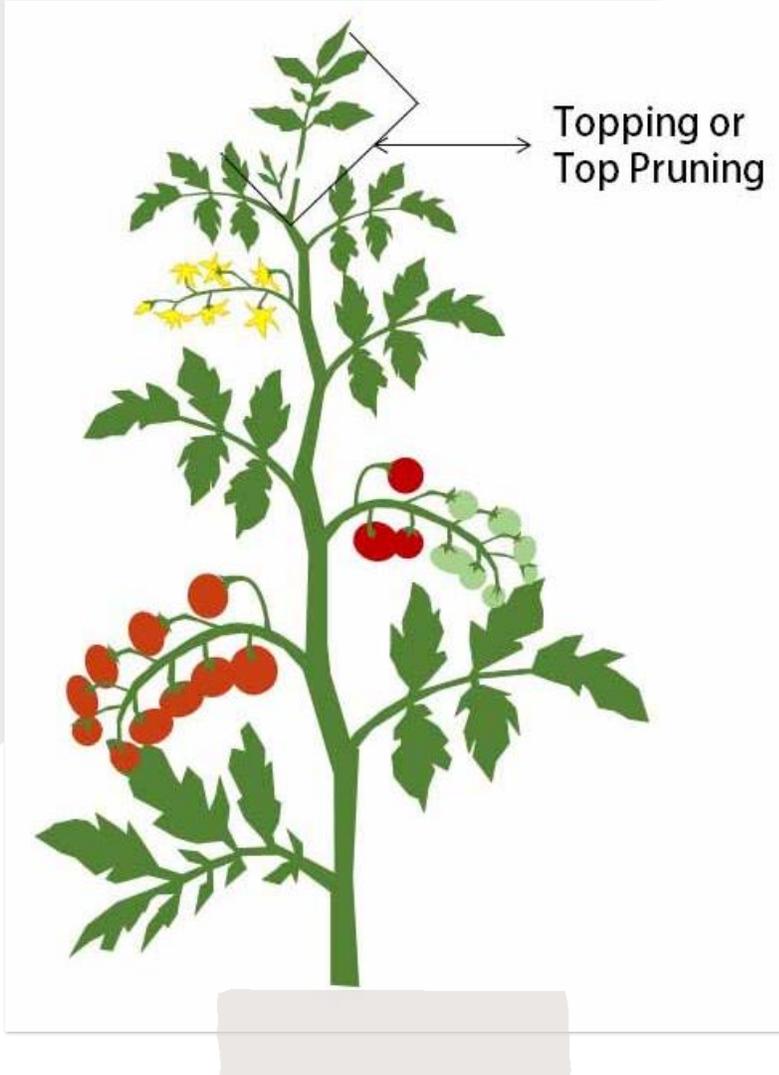
Heirloom variety: Taxi



OPEN-POLLINATED (OP) VARIETIES

- Seeds saved from the fruit of OP varieties will produce plants with the same traits, as long as there has been no cross-pollination with a different tomato variety.
- Since tomatoes are primarily self-pollinating, only 10-20 feet of separation is needed between different varieties to prevent cross-pollination
- “Heirloom” varieties are OP varieties that have a story and have been grown by families or communities for generations.
- Seeds from OP varieties can be saved by home gardeners for future seasons, to share with family and friends, and to share with their community.
- Saving seeds decreases the cost of gardening and increases the garden’s resilience and the gardener’s self-sufficiency.
- The majority of heirloom tomato varieties are indeterminate.

TOPPING / PRUNING



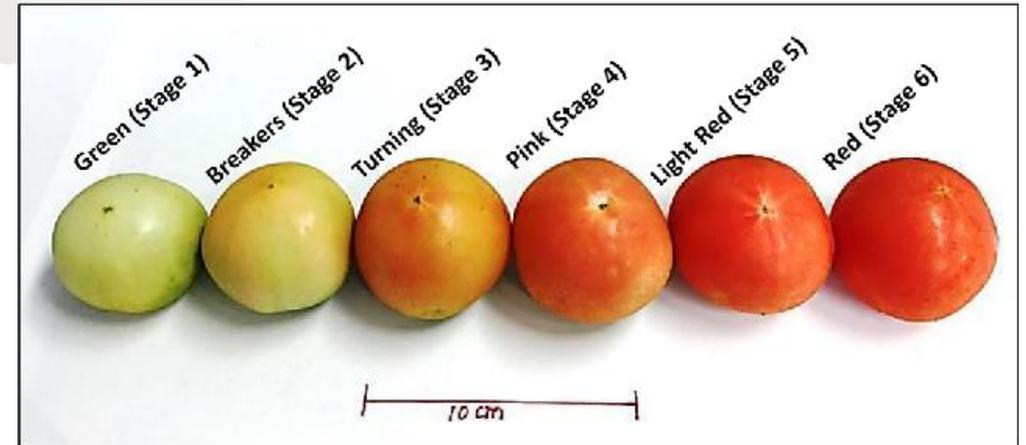
- Late season pruning, called topping, involves cutting off the tops of the growing stems.
- This method should only be used on indeterminate plants.
- Topping can help control the size of the plant if it is outgrowing the trellis.
- By halting the plant's efforts to grow more stems, leaves, and blossoms by topping, the plant will put more energy into the fruit that is already set.
- If topping is needed, it is best done in mid to late August for large-fruited varieties and in early September for small-fruited varieties.
- Leave enough leaf cover to prevent sun scald.

END OF SEASON - HARVESTING AND PROCESSING

- The first hard frost will kill your tomato plants.
- Pick all unripe tomatoes right before the frost. Any at the “breaker stage” will ripen on the counter or packed in a box, layered with newspaper.



- Immature, fully green fruits will likely not ripen so consider using them to make fried green tomatoes, green tomato pickles, or green tomato salsa verde.



SAVING SEEDS FROM YOUR TOMATOES

STEP 1: COLLECTING THE SEEDS

- Choose the best quality fruit from healthiest vines and allow to fully ripen.
- Slice fruit length-wise if Roma or pear-shaped.
- Slice through the “equator” (middle) if round or flattened shape
- Squeeze or scrape seeds into a container with tall sides like a mason jar or cup.



SAVING SEEDS FROM YOUR TOMATOES

STEP 2: FERMENTING



- Squeeze the tomato to collect the seeds and some of the juice so the seeds don't dry out and can be swirled occasionally. Initially, the seeds will float in the liquid. Cover jar with cheesecloth or a coffee filter to keep fruit flies out. Store at normal room temperature and swirl contents 1-2 times per day.
- The bacteria naturally present on the tomato will break down (ferment) the gelatinous layer on the seeds. This can take 2-3 days. Don't leave seeds longer than 4 days since they could start to sprout.
- White mold may start to form on the surface. This is normal and is not a problem.
- Once most of the seeds are settling to the bottom after swirling, they are ready for drying.

SAVING SEEDS FROM YOUR TOMATOES

STEP 3: DRYING THE SEEDS



- Add water to the jar and swirl the seeds, then allow to settle. Slowly pour off the extra liquid containing pulp and immature seeds that are floating
- You will probably need to add water, swirl and pour off the extra liquid multiple times before all pulp is gone and only the clean seeds are left.
- Pour clean seeds into a fine mesh strainer and rinse well. Then transfer the seeds to a coffee filter, fine screen, or paper towel to dry.
- Label with the name of the variety. Once the seeds are completely dry, store seeds in an envelope or small jar labeled with variety name and year collected. Store in a cool, dark, dry place.



THANK YOU FOR ATTENDING!

- Best of luck with your gardening and seed saving.
- We hope you will consider sharing seeds with the Seed Library.

Cherry Tomato Variety: Cherry Roma
Prolific, good flavor, and rarely split
Seeds will be available at the Seed Library in 2022