

Tomatoes



America's number one garden crop is tomatoes. Tomatoes are fruits that grow on a vine. Many might argue tomatoes are vegetables, but since their seeds are inside, they are actually a fruit. Some tomatoes are eaten fresh, and others are processed into other foods like salsas, sauces, and ketchup.

In 2020, the United States harvested over 25 million pounds of fresh market tomatoes and over 22.6 billion pounds of processing tomatoes. Tomatoes come in all different sizes, colors, and shapes. In fact, there are over 10,000 different varieties. Illinois' most popular tomato is a Roma Tomato.



Since tomatoes are grown all over the world, they are a staple in many different cultures. Tomatoes are often combined with different foods, spices, and condiments to give them a unique flavor. Tomatoes are most popular in sauces, soups, salsa, and sandwiches.



Tomatoes are easily grown in Illinois gardens. Tomatoes grow on stalky stems that connect them to clusters on vines. Once planted, the fruit will take anywhere from 60 to 100 days to form. Before fully ripened, no matter the color, the tomato is small and green. 15 to 20 days after the fruit formation, the tomato will ripen to the proper color and be ready to harvest.



Dixon Springs Agricultural Center

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What is DSAC?

The Dixon Springs Agricultural Center (DSAC), established by the University of Illinois in 1934, is spread across 5,100 acres in Pope County and is the largest experiment station of its kind east of the Mississippi River. We conduct research and share our findings as recommendations to farmers. Through the years, researchers have been able to help farmers across southern Illinois and the Midwest improve profits and become more sustainable. We focus our research in the areas of crop science, animal science, natural resources, forestry, and horticulture.

Why are tomatoes so common in Illinois?

Tomatoes tend to be easy to grow and just a few plants can produce enough fruit to meet the needs of most families. Tomatoes are versatile in that they can be eaten fresh in salads or sandwiches or processed and used in cooked dishes like spaghetti, soups and chili throughout the year. The quality and flavor of the fruit when fully ripe is often better than what is available on the market.

What kind of tomato research is happening at DSAC?

Tomato research in the high tunnels at DSAC focuses mainly on insect management, fertility, and selecting new varieties. Because tomatoes come in many different shapes, sizes and colors and there are thousands of varieties to choose from, it can be hard to know which variety consistently produces the most fruit and has a good flavor. This research helps farmers determine which tomatoes grow best.



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