

# End of the Season

The end of summer is the ideal time to evaluate the tomato season. I like to proceed slowly. It is best not to judge too quickly because results can vary considerably from year to year. I figure that if a variety has been around for a considerable time (like many of the heirlooms), it probably has some merit. If a much lauded variety is disappointing, I will usually try it for at least one more year before I dismiss it. For example, I have been growing 'Opalka' for several years now. This is a large, tapered paste tomato from Poland. I have had favorable results every year until now. This year, the fruit had the normal shape, but the fruits were only an inch or two long, compared with the five or six inches that I saw in previous years. Also this season, this same variety has been plagued with blossom end rot. I have never seen this problem to such a great extent on any variety. I water regularly and the organic fertilizer I am using has added calcium so I am confounded by these results. It makes me wonder if the seed supplier made an error. You can see that if these results had appeared the first year I grew 'Opalka', I might have been tempted to discard it entirely. I'll give it another try next year---but from a different seed supplier.

Having said that, I do think there are some traits that don't change from year to year, and I don't have a problem judging a variety based on those traits. Take the variety 'Red Star,' which I was looking



forward to trying for the first time this year. It is a small type with a distinctive lobed shape. I had heard favorable comments about its luscious taste. However, it has so far proven to have very thin skin. So thin that the fruit often bruises while still on the plant, and of course it cracks easily. Still, it

has excellent flavor and the interesting, lobed shape is important to those who appreciate visual appeal. I don't think the thin skin will change in another growing season, so it may be scratched from our list. It is difficult to offer or recommend a variety that is known for serious flaws. I suppose if one were to pick it and serve it right away, there would perhaps be no problem. I'll see how it scores at [Tomatomania](#) before deciding its fate.

Speaking of cracking, we often see cracking on tomatoes at this time of year. Oftentimes we see it after a heavy rain, or if we leave fruit on the vine too long. I try to pick as much as possible before a rain, and I also try to keep mature fruit picked. This is tough when you are tending a lot of plants, so I still have some cracked fruit to deal with. Keep in mind that vertical cracking is environmental and cultural---and therefore somewhat under your control. For example, you can pick extra fruit before a heavy rain, or you can reduce water. Concentric cracking is genetic---you will have to accept this fault if you want to continue growing a variety with this trait. Since cracking doesn't affect the flavor, I try not to get overly concerned with a little cracking, but if it develops into an unsightly gash I toss the fruit onto the compost heap.



I think a few words ought to be said about the visual appeal of certain tomatoes, namely the bicolor types. They can add beauty to any table, and any observant guest will appreciate them. One that never fails for me is

'Gold Medal'. This is a large, mostly yellow tomato. The center is pinkish red, and that color is also displayed at the bottom of the fruit. When sliced, the yellow fruit has a striking red starburst at or near the middle of each slice. The taste is just as delicious as the presentation.



Another favorite is 'Ananas Noire'. This is another large type, with most fruits exceeding one pound. The fruit shape is often comprised of several large, bulbous lobes. Even when fully ripe, much of the outer

skin is green. When sliced, we see the greenish flesh is accented with a beautiful netting of red veins. As with 'Gold Medal', the flavor is superb---at least, that is what my guests have told me.



Don't forget [Tomatomania](#)---our big, free, tomato tasting event. It will be held this coming Saturday, September 12, from 11am to 3pm at our Douglas Avenue location. This fun event is an opportunity to sample over 120 varieties of tomatoes. We set this up as a "blind" taste test, so your "old favorites" are put to the test. We think you'll

be surprised by the results. After you have finished tasting as many varieties as you want, you can record your results and vote for your favorites. You will then get a "key" that tells you which varieties you voted for, and which varieties you might want to try next year. The results of this poll help us to determine which varieties we offer as plants the following Spring. Along with the tomatoes, you will be able to

sample an assortment of peppers, sweet and hot and everything in between. We will also be offering a variety of tasty tomato concoctions, and don't forget to visit our 'Fresh Salsa Center'. To complement the assortment of foods, we also have a beer and wine tasting, with selections that were chosen because they pair well with the late summer garden fare. We look forward to seeing you there.

