

Heirloom Tomato or Hyloom Tomato?

by Margaret Raupp

It's tomato season and hopefully you are enjoying the bounty. If you grow your own tomatoes, you may be all too familiar with the challenges of growing heirloom tomatoes: cracking, catfacing and other defects, and the lack of disease resistance. But gardeners swear by the flavor and often the beauty of their favorite heirlooms.

In recent years, plant breeders and seed companies have developed what are now called hyloom varieties (hybrid + heirloom) combining the flavor and appearance of heirlooms with desirable traits of modern hybrids such as disease resistance.

In 2025, Cornell conducted Hyloom Tomato Variety Trial. Here are some of the recommendations as reported by Dr. Greg Vogel, Assistant Professor, Plant Breeding and Genetics, School of Integrative Plant Science, Cornell University.

Recommendations

"Hyloom varieties present an excellent option for growers interested in producing tomatoes with heirloom flavor and appeal from plants that deliver a much higher percentage of #1 fruit. These varieties also present the additional advantage of genetic disease resistance (bred using traditional breeding methods) to many of the most problematic diseases in our region. Many hyloom varieties are similar in appearance to well-known heirlooms; others exhibit unique traits that distinguish them even further.

"Specific variety recommendations depend on several factors, including preferred fruit size or color to complement other market offerings, as well as a grower's disease history.

"For high-tunnel production, varieties with leaf mold resistance may be especially useful - Lemon Boy Plus, and Contessa, among them. Contessa is also the only variety

in our trial with resistance to powdery mildew, another important disease in indoor environments.

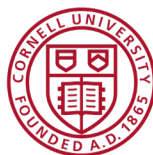
"Many of the varieties we tested carry late blight resistance, including: Mountain Rouge, Black Angel, Contessa, Harvest Moon, Woodstock, Marmalade Skies, Strawberry Fields, Abigail, Wonderstar Red, Wonderstar Pink, and BlushingStar. For growers who frequently deal with Septoria leaf spot, effective resistance options are more limited and include only Wonderstar Red, Wonderstar Pink, and BlushingStar. Finally, nearly all varieties that have been developed in the hyloom category are indeterminate, but three that we tested are determinate, and therefore easier and less labor-intensive to grow in horizontal trellis systems: Black Angel, Wonderstar Red, and Wonderstar Pink.

"Still, there are a few reasons why a grower may choose to plant an heirloom over a hyloom. Heirloom varieties offer name recognition that hylooms generally lack. While a consumer may recognize or even request a "Brandywine" tomato, they are less likely to be familiar with "Abigail" or "Pink Delicious".

"In addition, as F1 hybrids, growers interested in saving seed will not be able to preserve the variety characteristics of hylooms, as their traits will segregate in saved-seed generations.

"Hyloom seed is also typically more costly, sometimes up to ten-fold, compared with heirloom seed."

Thank you to Elizabeth Buck, Regional Vegetable Specialist, Cornell Vegetable Program, for sharing Dr. Vogel's report on the Hyloom Tomato Variety Trial.



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