



You Say Tomato. Heirloom Tomato. & Gazpacho

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What do *Box Car Willie*, *Money Maker*, *Stump of the World*, *Banana Legs*, *Mr. Stripey* and *Purple Passion* have in common? No, they aren't Kentucky Derby winners or country and western songs. And they definitely are not adult film stars. They are tomatoes.

Heirloom tomatoes to be exact.

Heirloom tomatoes are getting lots of attention from chefs and foodies alike. These beauties have more than intriguing names, a lot more. They come in all shapes and sizes. Some are bite-sized, others are

big and beefy and still others are somewhere in between. They are short and squat, long and narrow. A colorful rainbow, heirlooms are green and yellow, orange, ruby red, soft pink and even deep dark purple. Not just solid, many are striped or speckled. Most important, regardless of how funny the name or strange their appearance, they are all delicious.

So what makes an heirloom an heirloom? Heirloom plants have passed the taste-test of time and been passed down from generation to generation for fifty years or more. Heirlooms are developed over decades, in nature, pollinated by birds, bees and the wind, not engineered in a lab. Seeds are collected and saved each year because their plants produce an abundance of great tasting tomatoes.

You'll be hard pressed to find an heirloom tomato in a supermarket. Most supermarket tomatoes are engineered to be easy to grow, process and ship. But not heirlooms. Heirloom tomatoes aren't grown for packing and shipping, they are grown for eating. A bite of a perfectly ripe heirloom is nothing short of bliss.

Every summer we impatiently wait for the season's first local tomatoes. Not from Florida, not from New Jersey or even Massachusetts, but locally grown, ripened on the vine, handpicked and eaten the same day. Is there anything more wonderful? Well, maybe local sweet corn.

Our local farmers' markets are brimming with beautiful ripe tomatoes and lots of other wonderful summer fruits and vegetables. (Local corn is still a week or so away.) With houseguests coming and going, enjoy an hour or so at the farmers' market on your favorite town green. Bring your guests along or take some me-time. Leave everyone on the beach and spend an hour trading news and banter with your favorite farmers, artisanal bakers and jelly-and-jammers.

I discovered farmers' markets when I lived in Europe. Every Sunday morning I spent an hour or two at the marché in Divonne, France. It was like shopping in another place and time, before supermarkets and global imports made shopping impersonal. No fluorescent lights, no shopping carts, just the hustle and bustle of hundreds of shoppers crowded into the narrow streets of Divonne's old town.

A good excuse for a little sociability, most visits to the marché started with a chat over coffee at the corner café. Fortified with a café au lait and croissants, we plunged into the crowds. The stalls were filled with delicious fruits and vegetables, artisanal cheeses, free-range chickens and wonderful crusty breads. The cast of characters selling their wares, from the jovial farmer to the flirtatious cheese maker and cantankerous baker, only added to the experience.

Before the summer ends, take some time to visit your local farmers' market. Stock up on your favorite fruits and vegetables, fresh bread and pickles. And don't skimp on the tomatoes.

Bon appétit!

Gazpacho



Enjoy gazpacho for lunch or a light supper. Or serve it at cocktails in tiny cups or glasses. Enjoy!

Makes about 2 quarts

About 2 pounds vine-ripe (preferably heirloom) tomatoes

1 red or yellow bell pepper

About 4 scallions or 1/2 red onion

2 medium cucumbers

3 cloves garlic

1/3 cup red wine vinegar

1/3 cup olive oil

1 – 1 1/2 cups tomato juice – optional – if the tomatoes are really juicy, you won't need it

1/4 teaspoon ground cumin

Pinch cayenne pepper or 1/2 teaspoon hot pepper sauce or to taste

Kosher or sea salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

Garnish: fresh chopped basil, cilantro, parsley or chives

Core, seed and chop the tomatoes, reserving the juice. Core, seed and chop the peppers. Trim and chop the onions. Peel, seed and chop the cucumber. Mince the garlic.

Put the juice from the tomatoes, vinegar, olive oil and tomato juice in large bowl, season with cayenne pepper, cumin, salt and pepper and whisk to combine.

Add the chopped vegetables to the bowl, toss to combine and then purée in small batches in a food processor.

Cover and chill the gazpacho in the refrigerator for at least 4 hours. Serve with a sprinkle of your favorite fresh herb.