How do you like those tomatoes?

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Hollywood, MD - There’s a famous quotation attributed to the late British journalist Miles Kington regarding knowledge and wisdom. It goes “knowledge is knowing a tomato is a fruit. Wisdom is not putting it in a fruit salad.” Certainly in America’s culinary society tomatoes mostly associate with vegetables. According to the University of Maryland Extension, “the tomato is Maryland’s most commonly grown vegetable.” The Extension declares in their synopsis of home fruit and vegetable gardening that “tomato, eggplant, peppers and potatoes “do well in Maryland.”

“Almost any annual vegetable can be grown in the Maryland climate,” stated Ben Beale, an agriculture extension senior agent from St. Mary’s County.

In Maryland and other locales, tomatoes are the number one homegrown crop. They come in many different variety and they are not all red.

May 1 brought with it the opening day for the window for planting spring tomatoes in Maryland. A blog called Weekend Gardener states that tomato plants need “at least eight hours of sunlight a day or they get spindly and produce little or no fruit.” The ideal planting time window begins to close in mid-June.

Some other tomato facts from the Maryland Cooperative Extension
- Tomatoes require relatively little (planting) space and can yield 10 to 15 pounds or of fruit per plant.
- Tomatoes grow best in loose, deep soil enriched with organic matter. Experts recommend mixing a quarter cup of ground limestone or hydrated lime into the soil of each planting hole to help prevent blossom-end rot (one of the common problems of growing tomatoes).
- Beefsteak-type tomatoes are large-fruited types, producing a tomato slice that easily covers a sandwich. Individual beefsteak-type tomatoes often weigh more than one pound.
- Paste tomatoes are pear-shaped with meaty interiors and few seeds. They are less juicy than standard tomatoes and are excellent for canning and sauces.
- When watering tomato plants, experts advise to keep the root zone moist by watering deeply and regularly during dry periods. Water at least once weekly, more frequently during dry periods and when blossoms begin to develop.
- Staking requires wooden stakes six-to eight-feet long and one-and-a-half to two-inches wide. Drive them one foot into the soil and four-to six-inches from the plant. As the plants grow pull the stems toward the stakes and tie loosely with twine.
- Don’t refrigerate tomatoes. Allow them to ripen fully indoors at room temperature.

Tomatoes are great eating whether raw or cooked. Visit the University of Maryland Cooperative Extension’s web pages to read detailed information and view videos about growing your own tomatoes.

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