

Saving Tomato Seeds

An heirloom tomato is a plant that has not been bred with another tomato plant. These plants are sometimes a bit wonky looking. The tomatoes you buy in grocery stores that look the same from tomato to tomato and from store to store are hybrids. They've been bred to be perfectly round, a pleasing shade of red, to travel well and to grow to a sensible height.

Heirloom tomatoes have not been hybridized with other tomatoes to make them look, ripen, or grow a certain way. They take a variety of shapes, come in every color you could imagine and can grow to tremendous heights. Since heirloom tomatoes, and heirloom vegetables in general, haven't been bred with other varieties, you can save their seeds and be guaranteed to grow exact replicas of those plants from those seeds, whereas if you save the seeds from a hybridized tomato, there's no telling what you're going to get. You could plant seeds from a juicy, round, red hybridized tomato and grow pale-pink, flavorless offspring. You just don't know.

So, if you planted an heirloom tomato plant this year, now's the time to pick a tomato so you can save its seeds. Even if you didn't plant any heirloom tomatoes, that doesn't mean you can't save the seeds from one. Take a trip to your local farmer's market or organic grocery store and buy a few varieties, whatever looks good. Ask the farmers about them. They'll know which ones are the sweetest or tangiest. Take them home and taste them. Choose the one you really like and go out and buy another for the sole purpose of saving its seeds.

With most vegetables, the only thing you have to do is let the seeds from the plant dry out. With tomatoes, there's a little more work involved ... but not much.

You know that jelly-like substance surrounding the tomato seeds? In order to remove it, you need to ferment the seeds. The other reason you need to do this is because the jelly acts as a sprout inhibitor so that the seeds don't start to grow while they're in the tomato. Fermenting kills this inhibitor. It also protects the seed and makes it more resistant to disease and bacteria.

How to Save Tomato Seeds

1. Cut the soft tomato (it must be very ripe) in half across the middle (not from stem to blossom end). This will reveal whole pockets of seeds, making them easy to remove.
2. Scoop out the seeds into a bowl.



- Cover the seeds with a few tablespoons of water.
- Let the seeds sit on the kitchen counter until a thick mold forms. This will take four days or so. Once they start to smell, you'll know you're close to being done.



- Rinse the seeds clean in a sieve.
- Dry them on a plate (ceramic, plastic, or as a last resort paper). Do not dry on paper towel because the seeds will stick to it and you'll never get them off.
- Stir up the seeds every day or so to ensure they're drying evenly.



- Once the seeds are completely dry (after several days), place them in an envelope and then in the freezer or seal them in an airtight container (a Mason jar or Tupperware). Don't forget to label them with the name and date.