

I want big tomatoes

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I get asked a lot of tomato questions every year. No I mean a LOT of tomato questions. Two things seem to rise to the top of what people want in tomatoes - they want them early and they want them big. I suspect the desire for early comes down to neighborhood or coffeeshop bragging rights - please correct me if I'm wrong! People want large tomatoes because, like me, they enjoy a plate full of fresh sliced tomatoes. Big tomatoes come down to two things - genetics and environment. Some tomatoes simply aren't meant to be big and some years the weather is such that the tomatoes simply will be bigger given proper care. A Extension associate in Missouri does a broad test every year of fruit size and publishes their annual top ten list of big tomatoes. In 2013 and 2014 the heaviest tomato each year was an heirloom variety called Amana Orange. In 2013 the average fruit size was 13 ounces, last year cold weather was a problem and the average was only 10 ounces. Number 2 across the two year study was another heirloom known as German Queen. Both of these have limited seed sources so if you are looking for one of these you'll probably need to start from seed - ask me for sources! Some other more common varieties that made it into the top ten included, Beefmaster, Big Beef, Florida 91, Celebrity and Scarlet Red. This is an ongoing test and the more years of testing they have, the better the information will be. Now, as for early, will that's a function of plant genetics and mother nature. Also be advised that early tomatoes generally aren't big tomatoes. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm

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All America Selections Vegetables other than peppers

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I got all wrapped up last week talking about all the all America selection peppers I didn't even get around to the non-pepper vegetable selections, and there were a few. Again, a reminder that many of these varieties may not be available either as seed or plants for another year or two but file these down for 2016 or 2017!

First of all, Sandy lettuce. This is a leaf lettuce. Keep in mind that true head lettuces simply don't grow well in our Kansas climates. We never get good dense heads, well, not on our lettuce anyway. Sandy has excellent disease resistance, especially against powdery mildew which can be a problem in wet springs. It is slow to bolt, which typically happens when it warms up. It will produce a loose head if you don't start harvesting it as leaf lettuce. I love our next winner, Radish Roxanne - mainly because I've always liked the name! This is a bright red radish with a creamy white interior and resists becoming pithy or hollow even when oversized. It can even be grown in a pot at least 4 inches deep. Basil Dolce Fresca can be grown as an ornamental with also excellent culinary characteristics as well. It makes great pesto and recovers quickly if it's in the landscape. For those who have never grown herbs before, basil is one of the easiest. Two squashes to close out with. Squash Bossa Nova is a zucchini style with very sweet mild taste and is a very compact plant that produces early. Finally Squash Butterscotch is a small fruited butternut squash with exceptionally sweet taste and is perfect of just one or two servings. It also grows on very compact vines! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Sugar Maples

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. People love sugar maple trees. Big trees with gorgeous fall foliage. Unfortunately, sugar maple trees don't like Kansas weather. Well, most sugar maples anyway. A native tree has a native range. Sometimes this range is very restrictive so the population is small and the trees generally have a strong genetic relationship to each other. When you've seen one Fraser Fir, you've seen them all. Other species, like the sugar maple has a native range that covers hundreds of miles. With a native range stretching that far north and south, east and west, there are some genetic differences. Down in Caddo county Oklahoma, that's west and south of Oklahoma City by the way, there is an isolated population of sugar maples that are adapted to higher pH soils, lower rainfall, lower humidity and higher temperatures far more so than most other sugar maples. Kansas Extension Foresters made selections from this naturally occurring population many years ago and have developed a couple of fairly well adapted sugar maples for Kansas. How adapted are they? In August of 2003, the experiment field south of Wichita saw 3 straight weeks of 100 degree highs. All other sugar maples scorched and tattered which is a typical maple response to heat and low humidity. Not a single leaf on a single Caddo maple showed evidence of scorch. If you go to a nursery and ask for a Caddo maple you are liable to get a blank stare. So you ask them for an Autumn Splendor maple which is a traditional sugar maple growth pattern or a John Pair which is more compact and better suited to smaller yards! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420

KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.