1013 people took part in our blind taste test at The Totally Tomato Show, West Dean.
WHICH IS THE tastiest tomato?

Two of the most popular varieties got the thumbs down in our taste test. Luckily, much tastier varieties are available.

Despite the fact that seed catalogues and garden centre shelves are crammed full of a bewildering array of different tomatoes, many of us stick to the same old varieties. But do these traditional varieties taste better? We grew a range of ‘classic’ tomatoes from seed and enlisted the help of tomato aficionados at the West Dean Totally Tomato Show in West Sussex to help us crown the tastiest tomato. We’ve also trialled tomato feeds and reveal the two Best Buys that’ll give you bigger and better fruit.

We selected 19 ‘classic’ or ‘salad’ tomato varieties that were claimed to be suitable for growing indoors and outdoors. We sowed our seeds in April at our North Yorkshire test site and in May we planted up two of our Best Buy growing bags (New Horizon Growbag) with three plants of each variety. We put one in a glasshouse and one in a sheltered spot outside. All plants were grown as cordons, watered as necessary and fed with our Best Buy tomato fertiliser. The growing points were pinched out in mid-August to encourage the fruits to swell and ripen. Ripe fruits were picked, weighed and counted twice weekly. Fruit quality and plant health were also assessed. In September we took ripe fruit from each variety to the Totally Tomato Show in West Sussex and asked visitors to score them out of nine for flavour, texture and appearance taking into account sweetness, strength of flavour, juiciness, skin thickness, colour and shape. 1013 people took part in our blind taste test. Last year we also asked 970 Which? Gardening members to grow one of the trial varieties, ‘Red Zebra’, at home and tell us what they thought of it. In total, 497 members reported back.
**BEST TOMATO FOR TASTE**

‘Sioux’

It may not be a looker but ‘Sioux’ was the clear winner in our taste test. ‘Excellent flavour but its appearance isn’t so great,’ said one taster. It was sweet, juicy and had a good strong flavour. We picked the same number of ripe fruits from our outdoor and indoor plants but the yield was greater outside.

We harvested 7.4kg per growing bag outside and 6.9kg inside. Fruit quality was only average – skins on the indoor and outdoor-grown fruits were flecked and some tomatoes split. **Availability:** POD

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall taste</th>
<th>Flavour</th>
<th>Texture</th>
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<tr>
<td>★★★★★</td>
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**BEST FOR GROWING INDOORS**

‘Matina’

‘Matina’ came joint second for taste. It had a balanced flavour – not too sweet or sharp – and good strength of flavour too. The smallish fruits (36mm) and bright red colour were a hit with Totally Tomato Show visitors. ‘So attractive to look at and a nice crunch to the skin,’ said one. ‘Matina’ grew well indoors: we harvested 6.1kg of tomatoes from a single growing bag and picked the most individual fruits during our trial from this variety. Yields were almost as good on the outdoor plants (5.9kg) but fruit quality wasn’t as good. **Availability:** T

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**TOTALLY TOMATO SHOW 2010**

The show takes place annually at West Dean Gardens in Chichester, West Sussex. This year, the show is on the weekend of 4-5 September.

West Dean Gardens, Chichester, West Sussex 01243 818210 enquiries@westdean.org.uk www.westdean.org.uk

Opening times: 10.30am-5pm
Tickets: £7.50 (adults) £7 (over 60s) £3.50 (children 5-15) £18 family ticket (2 adults, 2 children) children under 5 free.

**BEST FOR GROWING OUTDOORS**

‘Orkado F1’

‘Orkado’ is a new variety from Suttons for 2010. It did well in all aspects of our trial. It was sweet, juicy and very flavoursome. It yielded the largest crop in our outdoor trial. We harvested 7.8kg of medium-sized fruit from a single growing bag. ‘Orkado’ was one of only four varieties on test to produce good-quality fruit outdoors. This variety also grew well inside. **Availability:** SU

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</tbody>
</table>
‘Red Zebra’
This distinctive, medium-sized (47mm) variety had an interesting pattern. The unripe tomatoes had striped skins but the pattern faded as the fruits ripened. ‘Red Zebra’ was rated highly by our tasters overall. It had medium sweetness and good strength of flavour but wasn’t as juicy as ‘Matina’ and only got an average rating for its texture. The quality of the fruit was good and we harvested 6.1kg of tomatoes per growing bag. When grown outdoors, the fruits were smaller, yields were lower and fruit quality suffered.

Availability: POD

Overall taste ★★★★
Flavour ★★★★
Texture ★★★

‘I’d definitely grow ‘Red Zebra’ again. The raw tomatoes were ok but they were excellent fried or roasted’

‘Stupice’
This small-fruited (39mm) variety started to ripen two weeks before any other variety in our outdoor trial. The tomatoes were highly rated for sweetness and strength of flavour although they weren’t as juicy as ‘Orkado’. ‘Stupice’ produced 5kg of fruit outside from one growing bag and 5.4kg indoors. Fruit quality was good. Also available as young plants from Simpson’s Seeds for £1.50 per plant.

Availability: TM, SI, POD

Overall taste ★★★★
Flavour ★★★★
Texture ★★★

ONES TO AVOID...

Despite being two of the biggest-selling varieties, ‘Ailsa Craig’ and ‘Alicante’ both failed to impress our tasters at the Totally Tomato Show. In the blind taste test, one triallist said of ‘Ailsa Craig’: ‘It’s watery, I wouldn’t buy it.’ Another described it as ‘not tomatoey enough!’ Yet ‘Ailsa Craig’ is one of the most popular varieties grown. It produced a lot of fruit in our indoor trial (8.3kg per bag) but ‘Ailsa Craig’ was rated as ‘very poor’ overall in the taste test and was the last to produce ripe fruits.

‘Alicante’ didn’t do well either. One taster called it ‘bland’, and ‘nothing special’. It produced a moderate yield of 6.7kg per bag indoors but was rated ‘poor’ overall in our taste test. Other varieties that failed to win votes in our taste test were ‘Battito’, ‘Cumulus F1’, ‘Fantasio F1’, ‘Tango F1’, ‘Thalassa F1’ and the yellow-skinned variety ‘Golden Sunrise’. These were all rated ‘poor’ or ‘very poor’ for overall taste.

Last year 497 Which? Gardening members also grew ‘Red Zebra’ at home. Two thirds grew their tomatoes under cover and one third grew them outside. Six out of 10 members agreed with our taste test results and rated the flavour as ‘good’. Triallists harvested on average 1.5kg of fruit per plant. Graham Mathers (above) from East Yorkshire grew ‘Red Zebra’ in his greenhouse border alongside two other classic tomato varieties. ‘I found that ‘Red Zebra’ was just as good as ‘Ferline’ and ‘Shirley’. I’d definitely grow it again,’ said Graham. ‘The raw tomatoes were ok but they were excellent fried or roasted.’
ON TEST TOMATOES

To find out which tomato fertiliser produced the best crop, we planted 76 growing bags each with three ‘Shirley’ tomato plants to test the performance of 18 fertilisers in our trial. Each fertiliser was applied to four growing bags and four were left unfed for comparison. The plants were grown in a greenhouse as cordons and tips were pinched out in August. Fruits were harvested twice a week and the yield recorded. The health of the plants and the quality of the fruits were assessed three times during the trial. Plants were watered as necessary.

We harvested more than two thirds of a ton of tomatoes. Our Best Buys promoted healthy plant growth and produced heavy crops of top-quality fruits.

TOmatO FEeds

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Chempak Standard Tomato Food

£4.50 for 1kg www.gardendirect.co.uk

SCORed 82%

Our plants fed with this soluble fertiliser produced 13.3kg of fruit on average per growing bag compared with only 4.5kg from unfed plants, and fruit quality was good. Note that the application frequency increases as the number of fruit trusses increases. It’s good value for money: one packet will treat eight growing bags for a season but it may be tricky to find. We recommend you buy online.

New Horizon Organic Tomato Food

£4.49 for 1 litre www.william-sinclair.co.uk

SCORed 82%

We harvested 13.2kg of good-quality fruit on average per growing bag compared with only 4.5kg from the unfed bags with this organic fertiliser. The tomatoes were consistently larger, measuring 69mm in diameter compared with 52mm from unfed plants. The feed was applied twice a week with increased doses for larger plants. We used virtually an entire bottle per growing bag during the trial so it works out more expensive than our other Best Buy, but this is the best option for organic gardeners.

### TOMATO FOOD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPECIFICATION</th>
<th>PRICE (£)</th>
<th>PACK SIZE</th>
<th>COST OF FEED PER GROWING BAG (£)</th>
<th>YIELD</th>
<th>FRUIT QUALITY</th>
<th>PLANT HEALTH</th>
<th>SCORE (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chempak Standard Tomato food</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>1 kg</td>
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<td>3.80</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phostrogen Liquid tomato food</td>
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<td>★★★★</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
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<td>1.40</td>
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<td>Levington Tomorite</td>
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<td>B&amp;Q Tomato food concentrate</td>
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<td>Westland Tomato (concentrated) plant food</td>
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<td>n/a</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
<td>★★★★</td>
<td>★★★★</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Based on recommended selling price for 1kg/1 litre or nearest size sold  
2 Based on amount of tomato fertiliser used to feed one growing bag when following the application guidelines  
3 ★★★★★★★ very poor to excellent  
4 Score ignores price and is based on yield (40%), fruit quality (40%) and plant health (20%)

WHERE TO BUY

Chempak 0845 217 0788  
www.gardendirect.co.uk  
New Horizon 01522 537561  
www.william-sinclair.co.uk  
POD Plants of Distinction 0844 856 0763  
www.plantsofdistinction.co.uk  
SI Simpson’s Seeds 01985 845004  
www.simpsonsseds.co.uk  
SU Suttons 0844 922 0606  
www.suttons.co.uk  
TM Thompson & Morgan 0844 573 1818  
www.thompson-morgan.com