



Tomato Varieties for the Low Desert

It's pretty difficult to find such a list because most varieties are not consistent every year. If we luck out with a long growing season (early spring and late summer), many varieties perform fairly well but with a short growing season (late spring and early summer) results are not very good. Tomatoes are tropical plants and as far as I know, there are no drought tolerant tomatoes. All require uniform irrigation to prevent various types of diseases.

Tomato blossoms will not set fruit when daytime temperatures climb into the 90s but that can be extended by providing shade. Shade cloth (about 50 %) is available at nurseries. You can keep tomatoes plants alive during the summer and they will yield again in the fall when the weather cools but fruit quality is not as good.

Tomatoes are classified as determinate and indeterminate. Flower buds on determinate types develop at the growing tip of the branches. When this happens, vegetative growth stops at the branch tip where the fruit develops, the plants tend to become bushy, and all of the fruit ripens at nearly the same time. Determinates are usually short season varieties with thick skins. Although they are not as juicy or as flavorful as indeterminate types, they are better suited to our climate and growing conditions. Select short season varieties that ripen within 70 days after transplanting.

Flower buds on indeterminate types grow along the side of the stem or vine. The growing tips are not affected by blossoming or by fruit development and the branch continues to grow throughout the growing season. In our climate, the early summer heat limits the yield. Fruit size is also much smaller than advertised because the high temperatures cause the fruit to ripen at a smaller size. But there are exceptions. Early Girl and Champion are examples of indeterminate types that are fairly reliable. Likewise, many cherry types are good producers. Sweet 100 and Sun Gold are among the favored cherry types.

The following is a list of a few determinate (D) and Indeterminate (I) types of a few that I sometimes grow with varying degrees of success. Other gardeners have their own favorites. The number indicates the advertised days from transplant to the first ripe tomato. Most need to be started from seeds. Those indicated by an asterisk (*) are a few that I have seen as transplants in nurseries but it is not a complete list. Nurseries will stock anything that sells, including varieties not well adapted but that are demanded by customers who want to grow what they grew in the Midwest or Eastern United States and who are not familiar with our limiting desert climate.

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| * 52-I-Early Girl | * 70-I-Champion |
| 52-I-Stupice | * 70-I-Goliath |
| * 54-D-Bush Early Girl | * 71-D-Ace-55 |
| 58-D-Oregon Spring | * 72-D-Bush Cherry |
| 58-D-Silvery Fir Tree | * 73-I-Big Beef |
| * 60-I-Grape | * 75-I-Better Boy |
| * 60-I-Juliet | * 75-I-Large Red Cherry |
| 60-I-Sun Gold Cherry | * 78-D-Roma |
| * 62-D-Bush Beefsteak | 78-I-Big Boy |
| 65-D-HY-X | 78-I-Rutgers |
| * 65-I-Sweet 100 Cherry | * 78-I -Brandywine |
| * 67-D-Bush Celebrity | * 78-I/D-I-Yellow Pear |
| 67-I-Sweet Chelsea Cherry | 78-I/D-Red Pear |
| * 70-D-Celebrity | 80-I-Black From Tula |

