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### *Solanum lycopersicum*

[Synonyms : *Lycopersicon esculentum*, *Lycopersicon lycopersicum*]

**TOMATO** (English, Spanish) is an annual or perennial. Native to South America (particularly the Peruvian Andes) it has small yellow flowers.

It is also known as *Fan kair* (Chinese), Garden tomato, *Kärleksäpple* (Creole, Swedish), *Liebesapfel* (German), Love apple, *Nsusowa* (Twi), *Nyanya* (Kikuyu), *Paradeiser* (German), *Patish-gah* (Persian), *Pomodoro* (Italian), Purple calabash tomato, *Tadam* (Maltese), *Takkali* (Singhalese), *Takkali-kai* (Tamil), *Tamata* (Arabic), *Tamatar* (Hindi), *Tomaatti* (Finnish), *Tomat* (Creole, Swedish), *Tomate* (French, German, Portuguese, Spanish), *Tomateiro* (Portuguese), and *Tomatera* (Spanish).

The glossy red to pale yellow fruit vary in colour and sweetness according to variety.

Warning – the plant other than the ripe fruit, especially the stems and leaves, can be poisonous particularly for children. The leaves can cause dermatitis. It can be fatally poisonous for some animals.

*Lycopersicum* is derived from the genus name *Lycopersicon* which is based on the Greek words *lyco-* (wolf) and Latin *persica* (peach) components, and is a Greek name for a different plant (probably Egyptian).

*Esculentum* is Latin (eatable).

The name Tomato is derived from an Aztec word for the plant *tomatl*.

The Haisla, Hanaksiala and Seminole North American Indian tribes all ate the fruit. However as in parts of Europe the tomato was not eaten widely in North America until the 1<sup>st</sup> World War in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

The Spanish are said to have introduced the tomato plant from Peru in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century (although botanists believe that it was first domesticated in Mexico) – and initially it was looked upon there as a medicine. Then in the late 1500s first Spain then northern Italy, southern France and Corsica all began very slowly to appreciate the joys of this vegetable/fruit. From that moment it was destined to occupy a prominent place in the now traditional Spanish, Italian and southern French dishes – although initially it was an ingredient primarily in sauces. The southern French had nicknamed the fruit ‘love apple’ or ‘golden apple’ by 1600 and the latter name was also picked up by the Italians *pomodoro*.

At this point however the tomato’s march through European kitchens seems to have been faltering. There was an underlying distrust. It was believed to be poisonous and inedible (authorities have mused on the possibility that the poisonous leaves and stem might have been eaten mistakenly instead of the fruit) in the more northern European countries until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. Here during this period, apart from possible attributes as an aphrodisiac, the tomato was viewed primarily as an ornamental climbing curiosity. This hiccup in its advance may also have been due in part to the fact that the plant bears some resemblance to deadly nightshade (*Atropa belladonna*).

Progress began again at the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. The tomato arrived in northern France in the 1790s and the French lawyer, writer and epicure, Anthelme Brillat-Savarin (1755-1826) wrote in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century

... unknown in Paris fifteen years ago. ... Very expensive at first, it then became very common in La Halle last year, while before it used to be sold by the half dozen ....

Despite this declaration the northern French seem still to have been wary until the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

The tomato's triumphal passage stumbled once again in its progress northwards when it reached the Channel. Although records indicate that it must have been introduced to Britain in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> Century, its culinary attributes were to be spurned (apart from a limited use in sauces) until the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The British hung onto their suspicions about it doggedly and some authorities declare that it was only after the 1st World War that the tomato started to gain any popularity in those Islands. (As in parts of Europe the tomato was not eaten widely in North America until the 1st World War.)

Today apart from the traditional continental European dishes, the tomato is used both as a vegetable and a fruit in a wide range of dishes throughout the Western World. They are still used in sauces but also in salads, juice drinks, chutneys and jam.

Tomato's introduction to Asia seems to have been as hesitant and fitful as that in Europe. Some records indicate its presence in Java by 1658, Malaysia in 1755 but by only the 19<sup>th</sup> Century in Japan. The timing of its appearance on the African Continent is not clear – but it was found growing inland in 1860 (authorities ponder on the possibility of it being introduced by slavers) and it was not at that time recognized by local Africans as a food plant.

Today in addition to its ubiquitous presence in the culinary sphere, tomato is a commercial ingredient for the cosmetics industry in face masks.

Medicinally, tomato is used currently in homoeopathic treatments.