

The Scoop on this Week's Snack!

My name rhymes with potato, but I'm not a vegetable. Pop me into your mouth and I'll explode! What am I?

You say "Tuh-MAY-toh", I say "Tuh-MAH-to" - we're both right!

In Mexico they have been cultivating us for over two thousand years and our name comes from the Mexican word 'tomatl'. Spanish explorers brought us back to Europe from South America about 500 years ago. The French called us 'love apples' and the British called us 'apples of gold'. At first the British would not eat us because we

are related to a poisonous plant called the 'belladonna' and only grew us for decoration. The first Europeans to eat us were the Italians – they discovered that tomatoes were delicious with pasta and cheese. They call us 'pomodoro'. Now the whole world is crazy about us, especially on pizza and in ketchup!



Does it matter if you eat tomatoes before they are ripe?

No it doesn't. Ripe tomatoes, like the juicy red ones you're snacking on contain higher lycopene (bright red carotene) content than green or unripe tomatoes. So, riper and redder is better – try saying that 3 times fast!

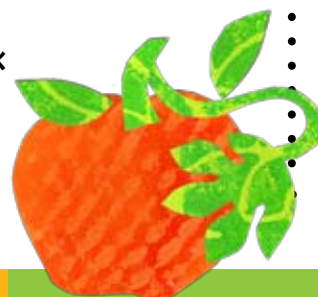
Vitamin A+C+E+carotenoids = Tomatoes = Healthy you!

Fruit or Vegetable?

Since tomatoes are often served in sauces, salads and with savoury dishes, many of us call them vegetables. They're really a fruit. Confused? Well, a vegetable is the edible stem, flowers, leaves or roots of a plant. A fruit is the edible part of the plant that contains the seeds. A tomato is the ripened ovary of tomato plant flower – that

makes it a fruit, actually, a berry. Still don't believe me? Take one bite and you'll taste that your tomato is so sweet it couldn't be anything but a fruit! Maybe that's why they named these little gems after the fruits they resemble – strawberry, grape and cherry.

Can you name any other fruits that we commonly think of as vegetables? (Remember, the edible part contains the seeds...find the picture clues!)



In the Hot House

The growing season in BC is short with cool, rainy days and frosty evenings starting in early fall. That's why some farmers developed large heated greenhouses to extend the season and produce ripe, fresh produce all year. Since Hot House tomatoes don't need to be shipped as far, they can be left on the plant for longer and harvested when they are ripe and at their best. You can recognize a Hot House grown fruit or vegetable by their Hot House sticker.

What is it like inside a Hot House?

Picture a huge glass building as long as a playing field lined with rows of Dr. Seuss-like Christmas trees – bright green and red ornaments dangling from spindly, green branches. Dew drips off the steamy glass and the buzzing of bumblebees fills the hot air. How hot is it? At least 13C at night, remember some plants, like tomatoes, came from South America where it's warm all year round. Take a deep breath – it smells like summer.

Inside their Hot House, farmers can regulate the temperature, light, planting and even pollination. One thing they can't control though is the sun, and plants need sunlight for photosynthesis. So, during the darkest months of December and January, growers shut down their Hot Houses and take the opportunity to do a little Hot House housekeeping and replace old plants with new ones to get ready for another growing season.



Are greenhouses made of green glass?

No, they're just called greenhouses because of what's inside – green plants. While both greenhouses and Hot Houses provide an enclosed growing space for plants that would not survive on their own outside in a cold climate, there is a difference. It's heat. Greenhouses protect plants from the outdoor elements but aren't heated. A Hot House is kept at a constant temperature so that plants from warmer climates can thrive.

We started this week's Scoop with a tomato riddle. Have fun making up your own food riddles. Here's one to get you started:

I have layers and grow underground, cut me and you'll cry. What am I?