**Tomato time!**

**At one of the recent trade shows this spring I came across a sign with the following saying: Gardening – cheaper than therapy and comes with tomatoes. This stopped me in my tracks! Obviously, this person hasn’t spent much time in the garden center tomato isle in May! So many decisions to make before you even pick out a variety. Determinate or indeterminate, hybrid or heirloom, cooking, slicing, cherry – even grafted. Add to this over 200 varieties to choose from and you can see why some of us may have our therapist on speed dial. Fortunately it all sounds more complicated than it really is.**

**Let’s start with Hybrids – they are the result of crossing several plants to obtain certain desirable traits such as flavor, cold resistance, disease resistance, higher yields, ect. Please do not confuse this with GMOs. This is not an issue at your local garden center because there are currently no genetically modified seeds or plants available to the general public. Heirlooms are open-pollinated varieties developed over time and passed from generation to generation. Usually, if such a plant is over 50 years old it is considered an heirloom.**

**Determinate and indeterminate have to do with the growth habit and when tomatoes come ripe. Determinate tomatoes grow to a compact height and ripen most of their fruit about the same time (a good thing if you are canning). Indeterminate tomatoes continue to grow, flower and fruit throughout the growing season. This information is usually on the tag along with how many days to harvest.**

**Grafted tomatoes are the new plant on the block in garden centers. They are tomatoes grafted to a rootstock chosen for higher disease resistance, vigor and increased harvest. They also can come with 2 different types of tomatoes grafted together. It is important to pay attention to where the graft is because, unlike regular tomatoes, you should not plant them deep and bury the graft. You should also snip off any growth coming from below the graft. This year you will also be able to multi task in the garden with a tomato grafted to a potato plant called Ketchup ‘n’ Fries\* – check early for this one as it may be in limited supplies its first year.**

**Usually, after going thru these basics with a customer I am asked – what is your favorite tomato? I do have favorites in various types, some of them are:**

**Kellog’s Breakfast – an heirloom with deep orange, large, beefsteak type fruit.**

**Goliath – perfect sandwich size slicing tomato with great flavor.**

**Amish Paste – another heirloom great for cooking.**

**Sungold – a sweet yellow-orange cherry tomato, probably the most popular.**

**These are my basics but I always like to plant something new as well each year. You can go to our web site (www.portlandnursery.com) for brochures on tomato tips and information on all the different varieties to get you started, but when you get to the nursery during tomato time - remember I warned you – over 200 different varieties!**