

Tycoon Tomato Seed Collection

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If Tycoon is your favorite tomato variety, you have probably heard by now that the company that produces it is no longer going to produce the seed. Tycoon is a hybrid that is produced each year by inoculating the flowers of one (or more) parent variety with the pollen of another variety. The main market for the resulting hybrid is commercial tomato producers. Tycoon was “discovered” and designated a Rodeo tomato by the local Jerry Parsons/David Rodriguez led Master Gardener tomato testing team. They test available varieties to designate a Rodeo tomato for the benefit of local gardeners.

As popular as Tycoon is to local gardeners, our purchases are not a significant part of the total sales. If the commercial popularity of a hybrid variety like Tycoon falls, or even more likely, if the seed producer has developed a new hybrid that they think will outperform Tycoon, they discontinue Tycoon.

As gardeners we then have the option to change our allegiance to one or more of the available varieties, including the new rodeo tomato every year. This year it is the Sunbrite tomato, last year it was HM 1823.

There is another option, we can collect the seed of the discontinued Tycoon. True, it is a hybrid, so there will be some variation in the seed collected compared to the seed produced by the yearly hybridization, but past experiences with other favorite hybrids, show us that the variation will probably be limited, especially in the early years of the process. Collecting the seed may allow gardeners that are convinced of the superiority of Tycoon, more time to search the available varieties for something as good as Tycoon.

Tomatoes and peppers are 85 percent self-pollinated and crossing seldom occurs on the first fruit set of the plant. So, to insure optimum results, choose the first fruit which ripens on the plant which has the qualities (yield, foliage, health, vigor, etc.) which you want to maintain in the seedling selections. It is true that self-pollinating a hybrid will result in the gradual deterioration or "running out" of the original qualities of the hybrid but this process can take 5-10 generations.

Following are some simple directions provided by Dr. Jerry Parsons on how to save seed from your favorite tomato:

- Allow the tomato fruit to thoroughly ripen on the vine. Cut the tomatoes open and remove the seed by squeezing or spooning out the pulp with seeds into a non-metal container such as a drinking glass or jar.
- Set the container aside for two or three days depending on the storage temperature, i.e., the hotter the location, the faster the fermentation. You want to clean the pulp from the seed before the seed begins to sprout - although some sprouting does not completely ruin the batch.
- The pulp and seed covering will ferment so that the seeds can be washed clean with a directed spray of water into the fermented solution. The clean, viable seeds will settle to the bottom of the solution, allowing the sediment to be poured off. Several rinsing's may be necessary.
- Then spread the tomato seed out on a newspaper to dry in a sunny, hot location so they can dry rapidly before they sprout. After seed are dry, scrape them off the newspaper with a blade, and package them for storage in a cool (refrigerator), dry location. Label the package.

The seeds can then be planted directly into the garden about July 1 for the fall crop or March 15 for the spring crop. Another option is to start the seeds in containers filled with potting mix 6 weeks before you would normally transplant them into the garden. For a more detailed description of planting tomato seeds visit plantanswers.com.