

## **A Little Tomato History**

*Source: The California Tomato Commission*

*www.tomato.org*

The tomato is native to the Americas. Aztecs and Incas initially cultivated it as early as 700 A.D. Europeans first saw the tomato when the Conquistadors reached Mexico and Central America in the 16th century. Tomato seeds were taken back to Europe where they quickly found favor in the Mediterranean countries of Spain, Portugal and Italy.

As the tomato traveled north, it was veiled in mystery. The French called it “The Apple of Love,” the Germans “The Apple of Paradise;” but the British, while admiring its brilliant red color, disclaimed the tomato as a food--they believed it was poisonous. This same fear persisted among colonists in the United States until the early 19th century; but in 1812, the Creoles in New Orleans put their cooking on the map with their tomato-enhanced gumbos and jambalayas. The people of Maine quickly followed suit, combining fresh tomatoes with local seafood.

By 1850, the tomato was an important produce item in every American city. People were planting tomatoes in their home gardens, while farmers commercially produced fresh tomatoes throughout the year. When cold weather halted local production, consumers relied on areas with temperate climates to furnish their supply of tomatoes.