

# Tomato Paradise Saturday in Fairfield



Suisun Valley farmer Steve Tenbrink sorts through heirloom tomatoes that were recently picked from one of the family's properties, Wednesday. Fairfield's upcoming Tomato Festival will once again feature the Tenbrink's tomatoes. (Robinson Kuntz/Daily Republic)

By [Ryan McCarthy](#)  
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FAIRFIELD — The man whose farm supplies the Tomato Festival has been growing the fruit since 1982 and was introduced to agriculture by his brother, who ran cattle in Mendocino County.

“I loved the country life,” Steve Tenbrink recalled.

He grows tomatoes on his Suisun Valley farm that includes wine grapes, walnuts and four acres of fruit trees.

“It’s in my heart,” he said of agriculture. “I’ve always loved growing things.”

Tenbrink, 60, had in his truck this week tomatoes the size of softballs – some red, some golden, some a blend of both.

More traditional tomatoes will dominate the Tomato Festival – which takes place from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Saturday and from noon to 5 p.m. Sunday in downtown Fairfield – that includes nearly 100 varieties grown in Suisun Valley.

Margaret Manzo, executive director of the Fairfield Main Street Association, said Solano County's ample water supplies mean the drought hasn't deterred the event that she said brings about 25,000 visitors.

"It's kind of tomato paradise," she said.

Some are sweet, some are salty and some are fried green.

"The range of flavors is amazing," Manzo said.

Months of planning go into the free event but it's fine if visitors are unaware of all the work the festival requires, said the Main Street Association official.

"That's a good thing," Manzo said. "We want it to be seamless."

Part of her job is to bring people downtown and the Tomato Festival is a perfect lure for visitors.

"It does exactly what it needs to do," Manzo said.

Grower Tenbrink eats a tomato a day. To growers, tomatoes display a uniqueness that can go unnoticed by the uninitiated.

"Every plant does it a little differently," said Tenbrink's son Daryl, 29.

Tomato Alley is called the core of the festival with free samples of Suisun Valley heirloom tomatoes. A Salsa Recipe Contest will take place at 2:30 p.m. Saturday at the Webster Street Stage. Performances for the "Fairfield's Got Talent" youth competition begin at 3:30 p.m. Saturday at the same site.

The Tomato Costume Contest takes place Sunday with prizes in four categories: Mr. Tomato, Ms. Tomato, Tiny Tomato for children 13 and younger, and Tomato Face or Hat. The contest is from noon to 12:30 p.m. at the intersection of Jefferson and Texas streets.

Democrats and Republicans seem able to agree that the Tomato Festival is a fine event.

A press release from the office of Assemblyman Jim Frazier, D-Oakley, invites residents to the 23rd annual event where the state lawmaker's staff will have a booth. Republican Alex Henthorn of Vacaville, who's running against Frazier, will be at the booth of the Solano County Republican Party.

"I love it," Henthorn said of the event. "It's grown a lot since its inception."

"It really shows off Fairfield's pride," he said.

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