

Gene mutation to blame for the tasteless tomato

By Gina Kolata, New York Times

Plant geneticists say they have discovered an answer to a near-universal question: Why are tomatoes usually so tasteless?



Yes, they are often picked green and shipped long distances. Often they are refrigerated, which destroys their flavor and texture. But now researchers have discovered a genetic reason that diminishes a tomato's flavor even if the fruit is picked ripe and coddled.

The unexpected culprit is a gene mutation that occurred by chance and that was discovered by tomato breeders. It was deliberately bred into almost all tomatoes because it conferred an advantage: It made them a uniform luscious scarlet when ripe.

Now, in a paper published in the journal *Science*, researchers report that the very gene that was inactivated by that mutation plays an important role in producing the sugar and aromas that are the essence of a fragrant, flavorful tomato. And these findings provide a road map for plant breeders to make better-tasting, evenly red tomatoes.

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