Tomato, Tree—*Cyphomandra betacea* (Cav.) Sendt.[1]

James M. Stephens[2]

Advertisements appear quite often in newspapers extolling the merits of the tree tomato. It is not a true tomato, but is a perennial shrub 6–10 feet high, having large, 5 inch long, heart-shaped, hairy leaves. The fruit looks more like a small eggplant than a tomato. It is 2–3 inches long, oval in shape, smooth, and long stemmed. The mature fruit has soft, red skin and contains many small seeds.

Culture

Tree tomato is grown in Florida in gardens and around the house, and does best in frost-free locations. It is grown widely in South America, especially Peru and Brazil.

It begins blooming 2 years after seeding. Fruit production declines sharply after 5 to 6 years. The time required from bloom to mature fruit is about 3 months. Plants are easily propagated from seed, but also may be started from cuttings. It has been slow to produce fruit in Gainesville trials, but has produced fairly well in Dade County.

Gardeners often advertise seed for sale in seed exchange bulletins, and it is listed by seed and plant companies.

Figure 1. Tomato tree.
Credits: James M. Stephens, UF/IFAS