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## SOUTH JERSEY

# They'll say tomato - all day

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Friday, August 20, 2004

### Festival to celebrate food tied to N.J. identity

By KATIE GRASSO  
Courier-Post Staff  
CAMDEN

Wiggins Park will be ripe with excitement Sunday as it hosts the New Jersey Tomato Festival.

Visitors can enjoy tomato-based dishes, contests and entertainment that includes a tomato war. They can even watch Attack of the Killer Tomatoes, Return of the Killer Tomatoes and Killer Tomatoes Eat France.

All in celebration of New Jersey's famous product.

"Our identity is tied to the tomato," said Al Murray, director of marketing and development for the state Department of Agriculture. "The many varieties throughout the world got their start in New Jersey."

The sandy, acidic soil of the state is the secret to the tomatoes' unique taste, Murray said.

"It doesn't matter where I traveled, when I talk about New Jersey people always bring up the tomato," said festival Chairman Ira Shaffer, who hopes the festival will bring attention to the tomato as a state symbol.

Shaffer also hopes to make the tomato the state vegetable. For trade and legal purposes, Shaffer said, the tomato is classified as a vegetable.

Botanically, it is a fruit.

The Jersey tomato is the seventh largest tomato crop in the nation - adding \$28 million to the state's economy.

At the festival, daylong entertainment will be provided by local disc jockeys and bands while children and adults can participate in various tomato contests.

The festival will hold a tomato war, where participants in teams of five use rotten tomatoes as ammunition to throw at the other team. Combatants must wear white T-shirts and whoever gets hit with a tomato is out. The team with the last remaining member wins.

Children ages 2 to 8 can participate in a tomato rolling contest.

Less messy contests include biggest, best-looking and ugliest tomato as well as best recipe. All contest winners will receive trophies or ribbons for their effort.

Visitors also can buy tomatoes from vendors and learn about the benefits from health practitioners.

Local restaurants will cook up dishes based on the tomato. Participating restaurants include Alexa's Kitchen, La Esperanza Mexicano, RC Bistro in the Victor Building, Warwick Restaurant, Cafe Neena, Smokin' Bones and Rumors.

Cookbook authors will also be on hand to sign books and offer cooking tips.

South Jersey tomatoes have long been a part of Campbell Soup, which will be at the festival handing out tomato spice cake.

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The Campbell Kids will also make an appearance.

The event benefits the Food Bank of South Jersey. Visitors to the event are asked to donate at least one can of food for the food bank.

IF YOU GO

- The New Jersey Tomato Festival is 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Sunday at Wiggins Park between the State Aquarium and Battleship New Jersey on the Camden Waterfront. The event is free and will be held rain or shine. Parking is \$5. For more information, call (856) 384-8182 or go to [www.njtomatofestival.org](http://www.njtomatofestival.org).

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