EVERGREEN TOMATO

Prevent a tomato from ripening and fool the gardener.

THE SETUP
You are going to create a “stubborn” tomato. It will not turn red and it will not ripen along with the other tomatoes on the plant. Although it still looks normal, our secret treatment will keep it evergreen.

Select a full-grown green tomato on a tomato plant.

Being careful not to knock it off the plant, submerge the tomato in a container of very hot, but not boiling water.

Keep it covered with the water for three or four minutes.

That’s all there is to it. The tomato is not cooked but the heat has stopped the ripening process cold.

INSIDER INFORMATION
Like many fruits, tomatoes produce ethylene gas, which causes them to ripen. The hot water treatment damages the enzyme that produces the ethylene gas. But it doesn’t kill the tomato. You can prove this by planting some of the seeds from your treated tomato. They’ll grow. The seeds from a cooked tomato won’t grow.

Tomatoes don’t have to produce their own ethylene gas in order to ripen. Ethylene gas from an outside source will work just as well. Commercial tomato growers often pick green tomatoes and pipe ethylene gas into the storage area.

Will the heat-treated tomato ripen if it receives a shot of ethylene gas? Test this by putting the evergreen tomato in a plastic bag with a ripe banana, an excellent source of ethylene gas. A “gassed” tomato normally takes three to four days to ripen. A tomato expert told us that the science of ripening is not completely understood. But clearly, this experiment proves that the ripening process has been blocked. Not only can’t the tomato produce ethylene gas but it can’t respond to it either.