

20-B The To·ma·to

To·ma·toes are plants na·tive to the A·mer·i·cas. They were un·known in Eur·ope un·til ear·ly Eur·o·pe·an ex·plor·ers of the A·mer·i·cas re·turned home with the m. In Eur·ope, cooks co·rr·ect·ly i·den·ti·fied the to·ma·to plants as a mem·ber of the night·shade fa·mi·ly. Night·shade plants were known to be poi·son·ous, and people were e·speci·ally su·spi·cious of fruits that were red. Eur·o·pe·ans con·sid·ered to·ma·toes cur·io·si·ties, not food.

Man·y ear·ly Eur·o·pe·an settlers in the A·mer·i·cas did grow to·ma·toes, but us·u·ally on·ly as or·na·men·tal plants. E·ven in the mid-1800s, people grew to·ma·toes in their flo·wer gar·dens for their pretty red fruits. No one e·ver dreamed of eat·ing one. But grad·u·ally word got ot that to·ma·toes were ed·i·ble if they were cooked for a long time. Cooks would stew them with half a cup of su·gar in a tin cup at the back of the wood stove. Still man·y people were a·fraid to eat them. One hus·band of the 1880s came home to find his wife con·coc·ting a

t₀·ma·to di^{sh}. "Get rid of that - d^o you want to kill us all?" he thun·dered.

But t₀·ma·toe^s caught on, and t^o·day peo·ple eat t₀·ma·toe^s raw or cooked in stew^s, so^ups, or sa^uce^s. They eat t₀·ma·toe^s a·lone or in com·bi·na·tion with o·ther f^ood^s. It's hard to i·ma·gine a time-not so ver·y long a·go---when t₀·ma·toe^s were not con·sid·ered a de·li·cious, ver·sa·tile f^ood.