

Tomatoes

When tomatoes were first introduced from the New World to Europe they were considered to be poisonous & most people shied away from them or used them only as garden ornaments. Since then they have become by far the most popular vegetable (or fruit) grown in home gardens today. If you have ever tasted a home-grown, fully vine-ripened tomato it's easy to understand why. They are easy to grow whether from seed or from store bought transplants. Read on to learn how to grow tomatoes successfully.

starting from seed

START SEEDS 6 - 8 WEEKS BEFORE THE LAST FROST DATE IN YOUR AREA.

- 1 Fill seeding trays or pots with a moistened good quality seed starter mix. Firm gently to remove air pockets.
- 2 Sprinkle seed sparingly over the surface & cover with 1/2 cm (1/4") of starter mix. Press to firm.
- 3 Place trays or pots in a very sunny window or under growlights. Keep soil moist but not overly wet. Germination should take place within 8 - 11 days. Rotate trays or pots to keep seedlings growing straight. When seedlings have developed their first set of mature leaves begin feeding with a light solution of 20-20-20 or LIQUID SEAWEED.
- 4 When seedlings are about 5 cm (2") tall transplant them into 10 cm (4") pots setting plants deeper into the soil than they were in the seeding trays. Use a sterilized potting soil. Continue to grow in a sunny location indoors or outdoors in a cold frame. TIP...before your tomato plants are ready to be planted they will need to be acclimatized to the outdoors: place plants in their pots in a protected location outside for 7 - 10 days until they are 'hardened off'.
- 5 When the plants are at least 10 - 15 cm (4 - 6") tall & outdoor temperatures no longer dip below 12°C (55°F) transplant them into the garden.

transplanting

- 1 Tomatoes should be situated where they will receive plenty of sun, warmth & good air circulation. Against a south facing wall or fence is ideal.
- 2 Prepare planting area by spading in plenty of organic matter (compost, SOIL ENERGIZER, peat moss, mushroom manure). Dig planting holes & work in a balanced fertilizer such as 6 - 8 - 6 or EVERGRO 10-15-19 VEGETABLE AND TOMATO FOOD, some bone meal & some lime. Set tomato plants 8-10 cm (3 - 4") deep leaving the top sets of leaves above the soil line. Roots will form along the buried stem giving the plants lots of stability. Space plants 45 - 90 cm (18 - 36") apart for staked or caged plants & .90 - 1.2m (3 - 4 ft.) apart for untrained plants.

fertilizing

Fertilize tomato plants at transplant time, again when fruits have begun to set & every 3 weeks after that. Use a balanced fertilizer such as 6-8-6, EVERGRO 10-15-19 VEGETABLE AND TOMATO FOOD, fish fertilizer or a specific tomato food. Stop fertilizing in mid to late August.

watering

Water your tomato plants deeply & evenly ensuring water seeps down deep into the soil around the plants. Water at the roots: avoid wetting the foliage as this may encourage fungal diseases. Remember, deep fairly infrequent waterings are best. When fruit begins to ripen cut back on watering: heavily watered plants produce watery, less flavourful fruits.

harvesting

Pick tomatoes as they ripen. Bright colour & a slight give to the fruits when squeezed are the best guides to ripeness. If cool weather arrives before tomatoes have thoroughly ripened pick them anyway & ripen on a sunny windowsill. And don't forget fried green tomatoes are considered to be a treat!

determinate & indeterminate determinate tomatoes:

- 1 Compact bushy varieties that grow to a given height, produce all their fruit over a short period, then stop growing & producing. They need no pruning.
- 2 Good for short growing seasons, small gardens & containers for patio, deck or balcony. Examples: 'Celebrity', 'Oregon Spring', 'Roma VF'.

indeterminate tomatoes:

- 1 Tall 'vining' varieties that grow & bear fruit continuously until cold or frost stops them.
- 2 To keep these plants under control pinch out side shoots, remove top of plant when it reaches about 1.5 m (5 ft.), stake them well or grow them against a fence or trellis. Examples: 'Sweet 100', 'Early Girl', 'Better Boy'.

dwarf indeterminate tomatoes:

- 1 These tomatoes combine the best characteristics of both determinate & indeterminate tomatoes: they remain a compact size, produce fruit all season long & require no pruning.
- 2 Best for small space gardens & containers on the balcony or patio or perhaps even hanging baskets.
Examples: 'Tiny Tim', 'Husky Cherry', 'Husky Gold', 'Tumbler'.

staking or caging?

indeterminate tomatoes: use sturdy stakes at least 2.5 cm (1") thick and 1.8 m (6 ft.) high. Hammer them into the ground about 30 cm (12") from the plants. Secure plants as they grow with soft ties to avoid damage to stems. Other supports include tall trellises & metal spiral tomato stakes.

determinate tomatoes: use commercially available tomato cages or short sturdy stakes.

in containers

- 1 Grow in containers large enough to allow for good root growth - at least 30 cm (12") wide & deep.
- 2 Use a light soil mixture such as PLANTER BOX MIX with a handful of lime added.
- 3 Determinate varieties are probably best for containers but indeterminate varieties are certainly an option when grown in large pots with sturdy supports.
- 4 Choose a location with plenty of sun, warmth & good air circulation.
- 5 Fertilize with slow-release 14-14-14, a water soluble tomato food or LIQUID SEAWEED.
- 6 Make sure pots are well watered especially during hot, dry summer weather.
- 7 Harvest fruit as it ripens.

TIP...miniature tomatoes such as 'Tiny Tim' can be grown in a 15 cm (6") pot on a sunny window sill indoors.

TRY...'Tumbler', 'Red Cherry', 'Yellow Pear', 'Yellow Cherry' in hanging baskets.

troubleshooting

surviving late blight

symptoms:

Blackened shoots, dark lesions on stems & water soaked or black areas on leaves. Fruit will also become infected. Usually appears in late summer after a rainfall.

prevention:

- 1 Plant tomatoes under overhangs or provide a temporary shelter made with clear plastic.
- 2 Water at ground level only; keep foliage as dry as possible.
- 3 Begin a spray program with Copper Spray as soon as plants are planted out. Continue to spray until dry weather in mid-summer but start again when inclement weather threatens.
- 4 If disease was present the previous year, plant tomatoes in a different location.
- 5 Remove dead & dying vines & dispose of them (don't put them in the compost).
- 6 Monitor your plants on a daily basis & quickly remove any suspicious leaves.

blossom end rot

symptoms:

Fruits begin to rot at the blossom end. Caused by uneven watering & lack of calcium.

prevention:

- 1 Water deeply, evenly & regularly.
- 2 Add a handful of lime (contains calcium) when planting.
- 3 If your plant develops the disease sprinkle lime around the plants & water it in. The problem will 'magically' disappear.

deciphering disease resistant symbols

Variety labels marked with these symbols indicate resistance to the following diseases that may affect tomatoes. Eg. Roma VF - Verticillium & Fusarium wilt resistant.

V - Verticillium wilt (fungus)

F - Fusarium wilt (fungus)

N - Nematodes (detramental microscopic worms)

T - Tobacco mosaic (virus)

A - Alternaria (fungus)



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