

HOW TO GROW TOMATOES !

When to Plant

Start seed indoors 6-8 weeks before the last frost. Plant seedlings outdoors once all danger of frost has passed and soil has warmed.

Location/Soil

Tomatoes prefer a warm sunny and sheltered area of the garden. Deep, well drained soil is best. Tomatoes are an excellent selection for container gardening as well.

Planting & Growing Information

Sow seeds 6 mm (1/4") deep and 2.5 cm (1") apart. Plants should be spaced 60-90 cm (24-36") apart with rows spaced 90 cm (36") apart.

Seeds germinate in approximately 7-14 days.

Days to Maturity

50-90 days from the time transplanted into the garden.

Other Information

Make sure plants do not dry out. Consistent moisture throughout the growing season will provide the best harvesting results and help reduce potential problems. Regular fertilizing throughout the season helps plants obtain their maximum potential. Many gardeners find it easiest to add a small amount of all purpose fertilizer (20-20-20) at each watering once plant is established.

In regards to the growth habit of the tomato plant, there are 2 types – bush tomatoes and staking tomatoes. Garden size and the needs of each individual gardener must be considered when deciding whether to plant bush (determinate) or staking (indeterminate) varieties.

Bush Tomatoes / Determinate Growers

Determinate tomatoes, or "bush" tomatoes, are varieties that grow to a compact height (generally 3 – 4'). Determinate varieties stop growing when fruit sets on the top bud. All the tomatoes from the plant ripen at approximately the same time (usually over a period of 1- 2 weeks). They require a limited amount of staking for support and are well suited for container planting. Determinate tomato plants do not need to be pruned.

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Staking Tomatoes / Indeterminate Growers

Indeterminate varieties grow, bloom, set new fruit and ripen fruit all at the same time throughout the season. They require substantial staking for support and benefit from being controlled to a central growing stem. They are an excellent solution for small gardens where there is usually more room for plants to move upwards instead of spreading out.

Pruning

Pruning tomato plants helps your plant direct its energy toward producing fruit rather than producing more foliage. Not only is larger fruit produced earlier in the season, but plants are also protected against potential pest and disease problems. To prune, what you need to watch for are the tomato "suckers," which grow in the "V" space between the main stem and the branches on your tomato plant. To prune, simply remove these "suckers" by pinching them off with your fingers. This can be done when they are smaller than two inches tall. If they are larger than two inches, be sure to use a pair of clean pruners that you disinfect as you move from plant to plant to protect against spreading diseases. It is best to prune when the "suckers" are small to avoid stressing the plant by removing large amounts of foliage at once.

A simple task that can be done while watering or weeding throughout the season and one that will result in healthier plants and bigger fruits with very little effort.

Harvesting & Storage

Harvest tomatoes from the plant once they are ripe.

Extend harvesting through light frosts by covering if possible.

At the end of the season when plants must be picked of their remaining green tomatoes, place the green tomatoes in a cool dark location indoors to ripen (paper bags are good if you only have a few tomatoes or try a cardboard box lined with newspaper for larger quantities). Check regularly for ripened tomatoes and watch for any decay or rot which could spread to surrounding tomatoes.

Store tomatoes at room temperature for best flavor and if necessary to store longer, they can be refrigerated.

Companion Planting

Likes: Asparagus, celery, carrot, parsley, marigold

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How to Make Sun-Dried Tomatoes

Small meaty tomatoes are ideal for drying. Plum or Roma tomatoes work very well but other varieties will work too – experiment to see what you like best!

Prepare your tomatoes for drying by cutting smaller tomatoes like the cherry types or the smaller Italian varieties in half. Larger tomatoes will need to be cut into ½ inch slices.

Drain your tomatoes slightly on paper towels.

If you want you can sprinkle lightly with salt or other herbs to season them prior to drying for more flavors.

If you have a dehydrator, place the tomatoes on the racks of your dehydrator, leaving enough space between the pieces for the air to circulate. Drying tomatoes in your dehydrator may take from 8 to 16 hours, depending on the thickness of your slices. To oven dry, place tomatoes in single layers on wire racks or foil lined cookie sheets. Oven temperature should be between 140 and 150 degrees, or set temperature on warm and prop the door open slightly. Oven drying will take from 10 to 24 hours. Racks or cookie sheets may need to be rotated throughout the drying process.

When the tomatoes are dried they should be leathery but pliable, but non-sticky (raisin-like texture). Do not over dry.

To store your tomatoes, let them cool completely, and put in bags or glass jars with an airtight lid. They will keep this way for up to 6 months. If wanting longer storage, put them in the freezer.

To rehydrate your tomatoes if need be, soak them for 5 to 10 minutes in hot water, broth, or wine to cover.

To store your tomatoes in oil, you will first need to rehydrate your tomatoes slightly, just until plump but still chewy. Dip them in either wine or distilled vinegar and then pack them in a jar with olive oil and some herbs such as, thyme or oregano, and some sliced garlic. Allow this to sit at room temperature for 4 to 8 hours. Then place them in the refrigerator.

Tomatoes Examined

Plum – Plum tomatoes often have fine thick flesh and reduced amounts of pulp. This makes them good for holding shape when canned, and it means they also slice quite well. Because they have less pulp they cook down for sauces faster. Roma tomatoes are part of this category.

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Beefsteak – Beefsteaks are the very biggest tomatoes. They hold together well when sliced, and together with their large size, make them the ideal 'slicer' for sandwiches

Salad – Pulp tends to fall out if they are sliced and their smaller size makes them ideal for cutting in half or in quarters to have with a salad.

Cherry – Tiny tomatoes for putting whole in salads, or snacking. Usually very prolific.

Tomato Pests & Problems

Leaf Curl: The rolling or curling of tomato leaves can be a symptom of environmental stress, herbicide damage or viral infection.

Tomato leaves curl naturally if it's too dry, too hot, too humid or too windy. In other words, the leaves will tend to curl if growing conditions are not optimum for the plant. If it's too hot and dry, water more deeply. If it's too wet, water less frequently (make sure you water deeply though).

Tomato leaf roll symptoms may also be a direct result of herbicide injury. Plant recovery depends on the severity of the exposure.

Tomato leaf roll may be associated with viral infection. Tomato yellow leaf curl virus is transmitted by sap-sucking insect vectors and causes leaf roll symptoms in infected tomato plants. Purplish veins on the leaf underside will help to distinguish this virus from physiological leaf roll and herbicide injury.

Catfacing is when the fruits are deformed (unusual swellings) and there are scar-like streaks on the tomatoes. This can be caused by abnormal flower development usually due to cool weather during the plant's pollination. Tomatoes are not as nice to look at but are still edible.

Blossom end rot occurs when the fruits look normal on the top, but when you go to pick them there is a large, unappetizing black spot on the blossom end of the tomato. This is not a disease, but is caused by a lack of calcium in the fruit. One way to avoid this is to make sure you water and mulch regularly.

Fusarium and verticillium wilt are the two most harmful fungal diseases that attack tomato plants. Infected plants display yellowing and wilting of the older leaves about midsummer. The yellowing moves up the stem until the whole plant is dead. The best defense is to be proactive in the garden and practice crop rotation. Planting wilt-resistant tomato varieties, which are designated by a VF after the cultivar name to help avoid these problems.

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Note: Do not plant tomatoes or any of their relatives (eggplant, peppers or potatoes) in an area that has been infected for at least 4 to 6 years.

Fruit rot occurs when fruits are allowed to touch the ground. Stake or cage tomato plants so that they never contact the soil and always leave enough space between your tomatoes for air circulation so that the foliage will dry off more rapidly.

Sunscald can occur when fruits are exposed to excessive and intense sunlight and heat. This is indicated when plants and fruit have pale yellow and grayish-white patches.

Cracking in tomatoes can occur on the vine if the plant has gone through a fast growth period and then goes through a dry spell. Keep moisture levels as even as possible throughout the season.

Early Blight can affect the foliage, stems and fruit of tomatoes. Symptoms include dark spots with concentric rings which usually develop on older leaves first. The surrounding leaf area may turn yellow. Affected leaves may die prematurely, exposing the fruits to sun scald. Early Blight fungus overwinters in plant residue and is soil-borne. It can also come in on transplants. Remove affected plants and thoroughly clean fall garden debris. Wet weather and stressed plants increase likelihood of attack.

Advice for Growing Tomatoes

1. Water Evenly
2. Do not crowd plants – keep well spaced
3. Do not work around plants when they are wet to avoid spreading problems
4. Rotate crops – do not plant in the same place more than one year (this include relatives of tomatoes – eggplants, peppers or potatoes)
5. Whether you recognize it or not, if plants are affected with something do NOT compost them.
6. Look for disease resistant varieties among tomatoes.

Source:

McKenzie Seeds (www.mckenzieseeds.com), a longtime supporter of Plant • Grow • Share a Row

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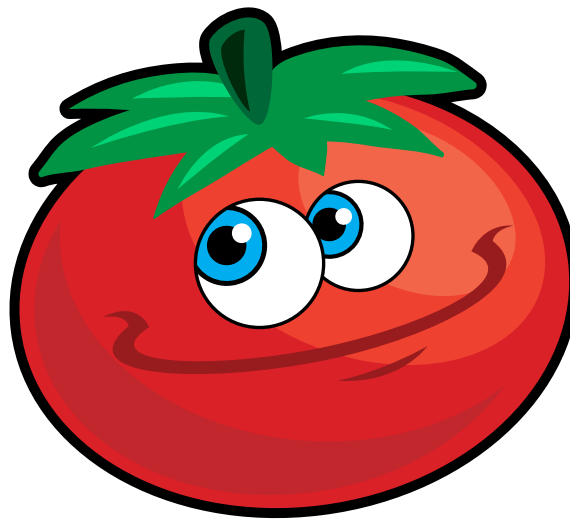
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Articles from Harrowsmith:

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www.harrowsmithmag.com/5750/yellow-currant-delivers-crazy-harvests-of-mini-tomatoes-harrowsmith-jr-emmas-tomato-patch



As part of your garden this year, plant and grow an extra row of your favourite veggies and donate the harvest to your local food bank. Help us help all those in need.

Special thanks to McKenzie Seeds for their great growing information and their long-time support for Plant • Grow • Share A Row