

How to grow: Tomatoes

Tomatoes are easy to grow and productive in small garden areas. The plants require a location that is fairly fertile, well drained, and sunny, getting at least a half-day of sun or more. Smaller vine tomatoes can be grown in containers.

When to Plant: Plant after all danger of frost has passed. Early May is the common spring planting time. For a later harvest tomatoes can be planted as late as early June.

Space: Most garden tomatoes should be spaced at least 18" to 2' apart in rows 3-5' apart. Dwarf varieties can be spaced closer.

Care: They are usually grown from transplants. Set the plant slightly deeper than the container and firm soil well around the root system. Water with a starter solution immediately after planting. They respond to mulching because they require stable soil moisture. Black plastic mulch encourages early growth, while organic mulches are excellent for summer when applied 2-3 weeks after planting. Use shallow cultivation near the plants to scrape away any small weeds. Fertilizing when the first fruit on the plant are about the size of a walnut usually will improve yields and lengthen the harvest period. Cold nights early in the growth period or hot, dry windy weather may cause blossom damage or blossom drop. Irregular shaped fruit may develop from early cold periods. Avoid excessive fertilization as it may increase the irregular shaped fruit and blossom drop.

Harvest: Tomatoes will ripen on or off the plant when the fruit are full sized and starting to show a slight tinge of color. Harvest early to reduce the chances of cracking, fruit rots, and other damage. Early harvest encourages additional production. Store ripening fruit at 55° F for maximum storage life or place them in a warmer location for quicker ripening. Red pigments do not develop in temperatures of 95° F or above, therefore, deeper red color will result from ripening off the vine in summer heat. At the end of the season, harvest all full sized fruit and store them in a cool basement for ripening to enjoy fresh tomatoes 1-2 months after the last freeze.



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