

Tips for Growing Tomatoes

Choosing Transplants

- Look for short, sturdy plants, not tall and leggy ones.
- We have a short growing season. Choose tomatoes with a “days to maturity” level of 75-85 days or less.
- *Determinate Tomatoes*: growth stops when flowering begins. All tomatoes are produced within 4-6 weeks. Good if you want to can or freeze them.
- *Indeterminate Tomatoes*: grow taller, flower and fruit and long as weather and lack of disease allow. Good for fresh tomatoes all season.

Harden Off

A week before planting in the ground or outside container, take the tomato starts outside during the day and bring them inside at night. This allows the plants to become accustomed to cooler conditions and wind and starts strengthening the stem.

Location

Choose the warmest site in an area that receives the most sun, a minimum of 6 hours a day. Next to a south-facing wall or building or in a raised bed are good choices. Apply lime to the area in the fall and work it into the soil.

When to Plant

Set the transplants outside only after the soil temperature is 50 degrees or above, typically around the middle of May. If they are planted in cooler soil the plants may survive, but the roots will not develop as well.

Pinch off Blossoms and Fruit

The most important thing for tomatoes is getting the roots well-established early—the better the roots, the more tomatoes you will have. Blossoms or small fruit will take energy away from the developing root system.

How to Plant

It is best not to plant much deeper than 6-7”, because the soil is usually cooler below that. Work some 5-10-10 fertilizer into the soil. Remove the lower leaves and bury as much of the stem as possible, up to 2” to 3” below the top leaves. If the roots and stem of the plant are taller

than 6-7 inches you can dig a trench 6” deep, lay the plant in the trench and carefully bend the stem upward. Be careful that you don’t break the stem. Do not crowd the plants. Plant determinate varieties at least 2’ apart and indeterminate tomatoes at least 3’ apart.

Staking

Determinate tomatoes may not need staking. Indeterminate tomatoes will probably need staking, caging or trellising. Install the stakes or cages at the time you plant the tomatoes.

Fertilizer

Apply liquid fertilizer or side dress with granular fertilizer again on the first of June and the first of July. (“Side dress” means placing fertilizer around the plants at the drip line and covering with one to two inches of soil.) Be careful not to apply too much nitrogen, which will inhibit fruiting.

Watering

Tomatoes need about one inch of water a week. If tomatoes are in the ground, water thoroughly at the root level twice a week. Tomatoes in containers may need more frequent watering. Never water from above because water on the stem and leaves promotes fungal diseases. Over-watering is one of the biggest mistakes with tomatoes. Too much water discourages fruiting and over-watered fruits often taste watery.

Weeding

Mulch the tomato bed once the plants are well established to discourage weeds and make them easier to pull. Pull weeds when they are young. Avoid cultivating around tomatoes. They are shallow-rooted.

Ripening Fruit

Because of our short growing season, blossoms are not going to make it into fruit from about mid-August on and small fruit won’t mature. Cut blossoms and small fruit off to encourage ripening of tomatoes already set. Reduce or stop watering about mid- to late-August to stress the plant and force fruit to ripen faster. 05/08