

Tomato Growing Tips



Light & Temperature: Tomatoes are heat-loving plants that require at least 6 hours of full sun to produce fruit. In general, the larger the tomato, the more sun it needs.

Support: Some indeterminate varieties can grow over 6 feet, so provide a trellis, large cage or stake at the time of planting. Determinate varieties are smaller, so a medium sized cage is sufficient. A few tomato varieties are suitable for containers and baskets.

Hardening Off: Put the plants outdoors during the day but bring them indoors at night. This week-long transition process allows the plants to become accustomed to cooler conditions/wind and strengthens the stems and leaves.

Planting: Plant seedlings or starts in the garden after all danger of frost is past, or when the soil temperature is at least 50 degrees. Plants need warmer soil for good root development. If the weather turns cool, protect crops with row covers.

Bury tomatoes deeply (up to 5") to encourage a strong root system and beefier plant. (See Grated Tomatoes info sheet for their specific planting instructions.) Plant determinate varieties at least 2' apart and indeterminate tomatoes at least 3' apart. Pinch off any suckers so that the plant can put all of its energy into developing a strong root system and producing more tomatoes.

Fertilizer: Add a lower nitrogen fertilizer in the soil; too much nitrogen makes plants grow leaves at the expense of fruit. Follow application instructions. Adding worm castings and compost to amend the soil aids in the breakdown of nutrients to make them more available to the plant.

Water: Tomatoes need about 1" of water a week. Water thoroughly at the root level at least once a week, using a slow drip or soaker hose. Tomatoes in containers may need more frequent watering. Avoid wetting the stem and leaves to help prevent fungal diseases like blight.

TIP: Over-watering is one of the biggest mistakes with tomatoes. Too much water discourages fruiting and make them taste watery. Too much water late in the season pushes pressure inside the fruit past the breaking point and causes cracking.

Fruiting: Most kinds will start setting fruit in two months. Fruit ripens from the base of the cluster (closest to the main stem) outward to the tip. Pinching off suckers and smaller fruit will encourage existing fruit to ripen faster. Harvest as soon as tomatoes color up fully.