



## Tomato Basics

Though tomatoes are referred to as a vegetable, they're actually a fruit native to Mexico and Central America where they grow year-round.

**Determinate** types are shorter, bushier and may or may not need support cages. Fruit appears at the end of branches and ripens close to the same time. Most container types are determinate.



**Indeterminate** types are taller and more like vines. They keep growing and fruiting over the entire season as long as the plant is healthy. Fruit appear all along the stems. Support with tall trellis/stakes to keep the fruit off the ground.

Try planting both types; determinate for large harvests for canning and freezing and indeterminate to get fruit throughout the growing season

### Symbols for Disease Resistance

Tomato names are often followed by capital letters that stand for resistance to certain diseases. Resistance to disease is indicated by these letters:

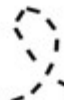
- V - Verticillium Wilt
- F - Fusarium Wilt ( two F's indicate resistance to both races 1 and 2 )
- N - Nematodes
- A - Alternaria Stem Canker
- T - Tobacco Mosaic Virus
- St - Stemphylium ( gray leaf spot )
- SWV - Tomato Spotted Wilt Virus

### Other Tomato Terms

**Heirloom tomato** - Any tomato that is at least fifty years old and is not a hybrid. Heirlooms are those whose seed has been passed down from gardener to gardener for generations. Many have great stories attached. 'Brandywine', for example, was bred by the Amish more than a century ago.

**Hybrid tomato** - A tomato bred by crossing varieties. Hybrids offer better disease resistance, higher yield, and other improved traits.

**Early variety** - A tomato that matures in 50 to 60 days; these are prized for early harvests and late summer planting for a fall crop. Sometimes we refer to tomatoes that mature in more than 60 days as 'early', but only in comparison to their peers.



## Tomato Basics - continued

### Good Growing Tips

- Tomatoes are generally heat-loving plants, some of which tend to grow tall, so give them full sun, rich soil, and a trellis, cage or stake to grow on.
- Amend the soil with compost and plant seedlings in the garden after all danger of frost is past, or plant a bit early and protect crops with row covers.
- Plant tomatoes deeply to encourage a strong root system and beefy plant.
- Fertilize at planting time with a complete lower nitrogen fertilizer; if you need to feed the plants later to boost growth, use an organic fertilizer. Too much nitrogen makes plants grow leaves at the expense of fruit.
- Consistent watering is the key! Water regularly but sparingly. Keep water off the leaves so plants aren't as susceptible to late blight. Late-season irrigation pushes pressure inside the fruit past the breaking point and causes cracking.
- 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. Harvest as soon as tomatoes color up fully. Pick ripe tomatoes one at a time and often to enjoy the best flavor.
- Pinch off any suckers so that the plant can put all of its energy into making more tomatoes.

### Some Common Problems

**Late Blight** (*Phytophthora infestans*) Tomatoes become infected when airborne spores land on wet plants, so your first line of defense is to keep leaves dry: Flood or drip-irrigate your tomatoes and never use an overhead sprinkler. Fungicide prevents and controls late blight.

**Blossom End Rot** is caused by poor nutrient (calcium) levels and moisture fluctuations in the soil. Fertile beds and regular watering is the best prevention. Note: Dr. Earth Organic Vegetable Garden fertilizer contains calcium in addition to other nutrients.

**Cracked Fruit** usually result from plants getting too much moisture and nutrients. Cut back on the water and fertilizer a bit and look for cracking-resistant varieties.

**Tomato hornworms** can rapidly devour your prized tomato plants. Organic options are to squash or drop the caterpillars into a bucket of soapy water or to spray with *Bacillus thuringiensis*, a bacterium that attacks and kills caterpillars.