



# Tomatoes



## Tips for growing the tastiest Tomatoes

Tomatoes are one of the easiest and most rewarding crops to grow in your garden. There are lots of great varieties to choose from, each giving you something different, from the small cherry and grape varieties to the large Beefsteak type. You can start them from seed in March and April or buy the plants already grown from May through July. If planted in a good location, they can produce crops well into October.

### Planting Tomatoes

Tomatoes should be planted in a location that gets as much sun as possible. A minimum of 6 to 8 hours of direct sunlight is required to produce good crops of Tomatoes. The soil should be fertile and retain some moisture as Tomatoes require lots of nutrients and water. The ideal pH is between 6.0 and 6.8. You can test your soil to determine the pH of your soil.

As a general rule you should not plant your Tomatoes outside until after May 24<sup>th</sup>. The night time temperatures need to be above 10 degrees Celsius (50 Fahrenheit). If you want to start them indoors earlier you can do so on a sunny windowsill. If you move them outdoors before it is warm enough it is recommended that you provide some protection from the cold night temperatures. You can do this by covering your tomatoes with plastic or a white cloth like our "Crop Cover" or "Frost Blanket".

When you plant most Tomatoes it is best to plant them 2 to 3 inches deeper than they are already planted. This allows the plant to develop roots along the stem and will make it a stronger, healthier plant. The exception to this is the 'Mighty Mato' grafted Tomatoes. They should not be planted below the graft or you will lose the benefit of the grafting.

When planting you should add 2 to 3 tablespoons of Lime to your soil before you plant and every month during the growing season. Lime helps balance the pH and provides Calcium and Magnesium to the plants. Lime will also help prevent blossom end rot on your Tomatoes.

### Fertilizing Tomatoes

The most important thing to remember is that Tomatoes are heavy feeders; they are the teenage boys of the plant world. You should add manure and fertilizer to the soil before you plant. It is also recommended that you feed weekly with a water soluble fertilizer like the Miracle Gro Tomato food (18-18-21) or the Gaia Tomato Supreme (4-2-2) or monthly with a granular fertilizer like Evegro's Vegetable and Tomato Food 10-15-19.

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## Watering Tomatoes

Be sure to water your Tomatoes regularly all summer. You will need to water twice a week early in the season and daily during the summer months. Tomatoes that do not get regular water are more likely to develop diseases and are less likely to produce as much fruit. They also develop thicker skin if not watered properly. When you water your Tomato plants try not to get water on the leaves. The cold water from your tap cools the plants down and may lead to blight. You should reduce watering around the in August as the night time temperatures begin to cool and to encourage the fruit to ripen.

## Staking and Supporting Tomatoes

Be sure to stake your tomatoes as they grow to give them support as the fruit matures. You can stake them up with a bamboo or cedar stake or buy a "Tomato Cage" that provides support for the leaves as well. This helps support the fruit as it develops and matures. Removing suckers (stems growing from the crotch of leaves) keeps the foliage under control, and they set a later crop of larger fruit. Determinate varieties normally set fruit in a concentrated time period. Their suckers are not normally removed.

## Tomato Pests and Diseases

**Blossom End Rot** is an environmental disorder caused by a calcium deficiency. It appears as a brownish dry and firm sunken area at the bottom of the fruit. Calcium deficiency can happen when there is uneven watering. Early fruit shows the affects sooner than later fruit. Fertilizing with dolomite lime and a fertilizer such as Gaia All Purpose Blend 4-4-4 helps prevent this disease as well as an even and regular watering schedule.

**Late Blight** is caused by an airborne fungal disease. It begins as leaf spots before spreading to stems and fruit. Water soaked areas appear on the leaves. Brown cankers develop on the stems and fruit. Prevention is key as there is no cure for the disease. Keep moisture off the plants by avoiding splashing the leaves when watering. You should also ensure adequate ventilation. You can apply *Bordo Copper Spray* regularly in summer to prevent the fungus that causes Late Blight from developing. Plants must be sprayed every 7-10 days before any symptoms appear. You should not plant in a bed that held tomatoes or potatoes last year, and dispose of diseased plants in the garbage not the compost.

**Flea Beetles** make many tiny holes in the tomato leaves. They can cause problems for small tender transplants but a healthy plant can usually outgrow the damage. Use our Floating Row Cover for early season protection from Flea Beetles when transplanting your tomatoes.

## Pollination

Tomatoes do not rely on insects for pollination. Vibrating the plant shakes pollen loose within the flowers, which then self-pollinate. If your plants are grown under cover, you can encourage pollination and fruit set by tapping the stem from time to time. You can also use *Laters Tomato Fruit Set* spray.

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