



Planting Tips for Tomatoes

When you buy - Choose dark green, stocky plants with a height and stem thickness appropriate to container size. If plant is a little tall, the stem can be buried during transplanting.

Soil Preparation - Tomatoes require well-drained soil. If soil is heavy clay, add peat moss or shredded bark. Spade at least 10-12 inches deep. Break up soil until it is uniformly crumbly. Work in an all-purpose garden fertilizer at the manufacturer's recommended rate. Organic fertilizer is preferred by some.

How to Plant - Select a location where plants will receive 6-8 hours of sun daily. Do not set tomato plants out if there is any danger of frost. Remove leaves from the lower half of the stem. Set the plant deep in the ground, burying several sets of leaves. Firm soil to anchor the plant. Water immediately.

Cutworm Protection - Cutworms can chew through a tender young stem overnight. Place a 2-3" newspaper collar around the stem of new transplants, leaving one inch above the soil line and an inch or more below.

Spacing - Depends on growing method. Free-growing: allow 3-4' apart each way; Staked: 1½ - 2½' apart in rows 3-4' apart; Caged: 4' apart each way.

Watering - Tomatoes need an even supply of water through the season, at least 1 inch per week (60 gallons of water for each 100 sq. ft. of garden.) Water early in the day to cut down on evaporation loss and to give plants plenty of time to dry out.

Mulching - Mulch is a cover over the soil that keeps moisture in, blocks weeds and protects low-growing tomatoes from resting on the ground. For

free-growing tomatoes, mulch is essential. Organic mulch will decompose and improve the soil (grass clippings, wood chips, sawdust, hay and leaves). Synthetic mulch such as black plastic should be removed after the growing season.

Next Year - Rotate your tomato crop by planting in a different section of the garden. This prevents depletion of minerals from the soil and disease carry-over.

Pruning - To keep energy of the plant directed to 2 or 3 main stems, pinch off shoots (suckers) that grow from the stem above a leaf branch. To control growth, pinch off the tip of the main stem above the top blossom. Toward the end of the season, pinching out the top will send energy toward ripening tomatoes.

Fertilizer- Regular applications of 5-10-10, 10-10-10 or a similar fertilizer (the package will show you fertilizer composition) as a side-dressing at the rate recommended by the manufacturer will help increase yield. Apply when tomatoes have just formed. Place a handful of fertilizer in a one inch deep circular furrow around each plant then cover with soil. Side-dress once more during the season.

Harvesting & Storage - Store fully ripe tomatoes in the refrigerator. Pink fruit will ripen at room temperature, or if stored for a week at 55-65 F degrees. If light frost is expected, protect fruit on the vines with old sheets, paper bags, burlap or boxes. Green tomatoes picked when they reached about $\frac{3}{4}$ of their full size will eventually ripen if covered with newspaper and stored at 55-65 F degrees. Leave stems on. Check often and discard tomatoes not ripening properly.