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GROWING TOMATOES

Tomatoes are most definitely one of the home gardener's favorite vegetables to grow, and there is nothing like the flavour of a home grown tomato.



Tomatoes are highly frost sensitive, so be sure to protect them from any possible frosts as they require approximately a three month growing season.

You can grow tomatoes in a garden bed, pot or other container very successfully.

Preparing your garden bed

Tomatoes need good drainage and at least 6 hours of sunlight a day to ensure you have tasty fruit.

Do not plant where potatoes, tomatoes, eggplants or capsicums have grown for the last two years, to reduce the spread of disease.

Start by improving your soil by digging the area over with *Zoo Gro* or compost. This will provide you with fertile soil for the plants to grow. You want to dig the soil to about a spades depth and incorporate plenty of organic matter as you dig. Be aware that if you are using lots of animal manure you could encourage more leaf growth at the expense of fruit. If this looks like it could be happening to your plants a dose of sulphate of potash will help to rectify this.

When we plant our tomatoes we add a handful of garden lime to help prevent blossom end rot. Adding a handful of *Plants Plus All Purpose Fertiliser* will ensure the plant has enough nutrition to grow.

If you are planting a tall growing tomato, it is easier to stake before you plant so you don't damage the roots of the growing plant. Be sure to use a soft garden tie like *Jolly Tie* to prevent damage to the growing stem.

Planting

Water the punnets or small pots with a solution of *Seasol* before you gently remove and separate the seedlings.

Dig a hole large enough for the roots to sit comfortably. You can plant a tomato deeper than usual to encourage a more stable plant.

Back fill each hole and water well.

A good deep watering at the time of planting is essential, with regular watering throughout the growing period to follow. When watering, be sure to be consistent. The best way to water is to give the plants a thorough deep watering only when the soil surface is dry. Ideally you would water in the morning at the base of your plants. The roots are where the plant needs water the most. Wet foliage, particularly overnight, encourages fungal attack.

Don't forget to mulch your tomatoes to help retain moisture and reduce the weed growth around the base of your plants.

Regular feeding every 4 to 6 weeks with *Plants Plus All Purpose Fertiliser* or *Plants Plus Organic Pellets* will aid in the production of a bumper crop.

Additional liquid fertiliser such as *Debco Plant Food* can be applied every 2 to 3 weeks to promote healthy flowers and fruit. *Seasol* or *Maxicrop* can also be applied every 2 to 3 weeks to help keep the root system developing. Remember *Seasol* is a root tonic and not a plant food.

Growing tomatoes in a pot or container

Any tomato can be grown in a pot, you just need the right size pot for the variety you choose to grow.

We recommend you use a good quality potting mix, and the Organic Potting Mix is very popular.

Pests & Disease

Most of us will run into some sort of a problem whether it be environmental, pest or disease based.

Blossom End Rot is a calcium deficiency which causes the base of the tomato to turn black or brown. It can be prevented by adding lime to the soil and watering it in well. Any effected tomatoes are edible when the discolored section is removed.

Cracking of fruit is an environmental condition which is caused by fluctuations in moisture. When the plant is dry then wet, the skin of the fruit can't reproduce as quickly as the flesh, resulting in cracking. This can be prevented by regular watering.

Sun Scorch is a problem in our hot summer climate. Fruit burn is generally caused by high temperatures and the sun having direct contact with the fruit. Tomatoes like full sun, but the fruit doesn't. By not over pruning your plants when training them onto a stake or tomato trainer, you will allow for adequate foliage cover of the fruit.

Tomato Tips

Basil is a great companion for tomatoes both in the garden and kitchen.

To encourage pollination of your tomatoes, plant marigolds nearby as the colorful flowers will help to attract bees.

If you find your tomatoes are flowering but not setting fruit, this may be because the bees aren't pollinating and you may need to do this job yourself. One way is to use a soft paintbrush and by touching each flower you can mimic the action of the bees. You can also gently shake the entire plant and the pollen will be dispersed.



Tomato Trainer

Varieties

There is a tomato variety available for every gardener.

Apollo is a very popular early fruiting tomato with medium sized fruit. It requires a stake or tomato trainer.

Big Beef has large fruit which is consistently tasty and fleshy. It requires a stake or tomato trainer.

Black Russian is an heirloom variety with medium sized fruit that has unusually dark skin and flesh which is full of flavour. It requires a stake or tomato trainer.

Burkes Backyard is another popular heirloom variety which produces sweet medium size fruit. It requires a stake or tomato trainer.

Cherry Tomato, any variety of cherry tomato is always a winner. Choose from Cherry, Sweet Bite, Sweet cherry Gold or Honey Grape. Grow them in the garden or a large pot with a stake or tomato trainer. Also a good choice to let tumble out of a hanging basket.

Grosse Lisse is a popular, old style variety which will produce flavorsome fruit from summer to autumn. It is a vigorous growing plant so is best grown on a stake or trellis

Patio Prize is a bush tomato with round solid fruit. It is perfect to grow in a large container as it doesn't require staking.

Look out for these new varieties:

CornDog is an upright and compact tomato. It grows to approx. 30 cm making it perfect to grow in a pot. It has a unique yellow egg shaped cocktail size fruit, with a little green stripping. Pick when coloured well for best taste.

Big Brandy looks and tastes like an heirloom tomato but with superior yields. It has big, pink beefsteak fruit with succulent flavour. Fruit can weigh up to 425g each.

Genuwine is a new hybrid tomato which looks and tastes like an heirloom variety. It has slightly flattened deeply lobed fruit with smooth, unblemished skin. It is very juicy with a high acid content. Fruit can weigh up to 330g each.

Heartbreaker is a unique tomato which produces small heart shaped tomatoes. The fruit is bright red in colour and juicy with the right sweet/sour content. It is an upright bush tomato with compact growth. It will grow 40cm x 30cm making it perfect for a container.