Talking Tomatoes

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Of all the vegetables and fruits people grow in their gardens, none provoke more joy—or frustration—than tomatoes. Here are some tips on how to get the best possible crop.

Tomatoes love sun and consistently warm temperatures. Plant in at least 8 hours of direct sun. Don’t plant too early—temperatures under 55°F can stunt plants, delaying fruit. Late May is generally a good time to purchase and plant. Cover with frost blanket, “wall-o-water”, or cloches when nights are cool. Plastic mulch also helps keep the ground warm.

Plant in rich soil amended with a handful of lime for calcium, lots of compost, and some pumice for drainage. Use a fertilizer formulated for vegetables at planting time, and again when fruits begin to form.

Tomatoes like consistent, even watering for best results. Water deeply at soil level, giving several gallons of water at a time. Drip irrigation also works well. Don’t let the soil dry out completely, but don’t keep the soil wet, either.

Tomatoes do well in large pots. A 10-15 gallon container is usually adequate. Use an organic fertilizer 3-4 times throughout the summer, and keep the containers well-watered.

Here are some favorite reliable varieties for our climate:

Early: Early Girl, Oregon Spring, Stupice

Slicing : Black Prince, Fantastic, Green Zebra

Beefsteak : Big Beef, Striped German

Saucing: Amish Paste, Roma, San Marzano

Cherry: Black Cherry, Sungold, Sweet Million

Heirloom: Aunt Ruby’s German Green, Black Krim, Persimmon