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GROWING TOMATOES

Learn how to grow tomatoes. Get tips about growing tomatoes in the ground, raised beds, or containers. Care for tomato plants from planting to harvesting.

[The Growing Zone \(/pages/the-growing-zone\)](#) > [How To \(/blogs/how-grow-to-grow\)](#)



Choosing [tomato varieties \(/collections/tomatoes/\)](#) can be confusing because there are so many, so use our [Tomato Chooser \(/tomatoes/choose-your-tomato/\)](#) to help you pick the best for your garden. Our article "[Learn Tomato Terms \(/gardening/learn-tomato-growing-terms/\)](#)" explains some basic (but important) tomato terms, such as hybrid, indeterminate vs. determinate, and VFN (disease resistance). It's a good idea to grow a range of varieties, including at least one or two disease-resistant types, since, of all veggies, tomatoes tend to be the most susceptible to disease.

How to Plant and Care for Tomatoes

- Tomatoes run on warmth; plant in late spring and early summer except in zone 10, where they are a fall and winter crop.

FEATURED PRODUCTS



Sweet Basil

This herb is known around the world for its wonderful fragrance and flavor. The key ingredient in classic Italian



2-pack
starter plants



19.3 fl oz
pot volume



full Sun

(/products/sweet-basil)

\$16.49

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- For a head start on growing, plant starter plants instead of seeds ([/gardening/5-reasons-plant-seedlings-instead-seeds/](#))
 - Choose young tomato plants from Bonnie Plants® ([/collections/tomatoes/](#)), a company that has spent over 100 years helping home gardeners grow their best gardens.

- Devote a prime, sunny spot to growing tomatoes. Tomatoes need at least 6 to 8 hours of sun to bring out their best flavors.
- You will need to stake, trellis, or cage ([/library/stake-tomatoes-off-the-ground](#)) most tomato plants to keep them off the ground. Decide on a support plan before you set out your plants, then add that support directly after planting.

- Give each plant enough room to grow. Space robust, long-vined, indeterminate varieties about 3 feet apart. Stockier determinate plants can be grown 2 feet apart. Improve the planting area by mixing in a few inches of high quality garden soil, like aged compost-enriched

Miracle-Gro® Performance Organics® All Purpose In-Ground Soil
(<https://www.miraclegro.com/en-us/products/miracle-gro-performance-organics/miracle-gro-performance-organics-all-purpose-ground-0>)

, with the top layer of existing soil. If growing in containers, you'll need at least a 24-inch pot for an indeterminate variety, or an 18-inch pot for a determinate variety. Be sure to fill containers with premium potting mix, such as

Miracle-Gro® Performance Organics® All Purpose Container Mix
(<https://www.miraclegro.com/en-us/products/miracle-gro-performance-organics/miracle-gro-performance-organics-all-purpose-container>)

, for best growth.

- Tomatoes take up nutrients best when the soil pH ([/blogs/garden-fundamentals/why-does-ph-matter](#)) ranges from 6.2 to 6.8, and they need a constant supply of major and minor plant nutrients. To provide needed nutrients, mix a continuous-release fertilizer with calcium, like

Miracle-Gro® Performance Organics® Edibles Plant Nutrition Granules
(<https://www.miraclegro.com/en-us/products/miracle-gro-performance-organics-edibles-plant-0>)

, into the soil as you prepare the planting holes. Continue feeding during the growing season as the label directs. This will help protect fruit from blossom end rot ([/gardening/conquer-blossom-end-rot/](#)), a problem that can occur when the plant isn't getting enough calcium.

- At the same time, mix in 3 to 4 inches of compost ([/library/what-is-compost](#)), which will provide minor nutrients and help hold moisture and fertilizer in the soil until it is needed by the plants.

- To grow a really strong tomato plant, **we recommend burying two-thirds of the stem when planting.** This crucial step will allow the plant to sprout roots along the buried stem, so your plant will be stronger and better able to find water in a drought. Please note that this deep-planting method only works with tomatoes (and tomatillos), not other veggies.

- Immediately after planting, water seedlings to help settle them in.
- You can combine fast-maturing varieties with special season-stretching techniques ([/blogs/garden-fundamentals/for-early-tomatoes-try-this](#)) to grow an early crop, but wait until the last frost has passed to plant main-season tomatoes.
- Cover the ground with 2 to 4 inches of mulch to minimize weeds and help keep the soil evenly moist. Straw and shredded leaves make great mulches for tomatoes.



Cherokee Purple - Heirloom Tomato

Heirloom. Cherokee Purple seeds, originating from Tennessee, are thought to have been passed down

2-pack starter plants	19.3 fl oz pot volume	Heirloom

([/products/cherokee-purple-heirloom-tomato](#))

\$16.49 [Add to cart](#)



Super Sweet 100 Tomato

When Sweet 100 tomato was first introduced it created a buzz among gardeners because it is so tasty and

2-pack starter plants	19.3 fl oz pot volume	Full Sun

([/products/super-sweet-100-tomato](#))

\$16.49 [Add to cart](#)

- Water regularly, aiming for at least an inch of moisture per week (through rain or watering), more in the summertime. Feel the soil; if the top inch is dry, it's time to water.

How to Troubleshoot Tomato Problems

- As summer heats up, some tomatoes have trouble setting fruit. Be patient, and you will start seeing little green tomatoes again when nights begin cooling down. Meanwhile, promptly harvest ripe tomatoes to relieve stressed plants of their heavy burden. If you live in an area in which summertime temperatures are typically in the 90s, be sure to choose some heat-tolerant tomato varieties, bred for their ability to set fruit under high temperatures.
- If summer droughts are common in your area, or you tend to forget to water, use soaker hoses, drip irrigation, or other [drought-busting techniques](#) to help maintain even soil moisture. Not only will this help prevent cracked fruits, but also help keep blossom end rot at bay. (Moisture fluctuations can reduce the amount of calcium the plant is able to take up, which can lead to blossom end rot.)
- Humid weather creates ideal conditions for fungal diseases like early blight, which causes dark spots to first form on lower leaves. Be sure to remove any unhealthy looking or diseased leaves throughout the season. Late blight is a more devastating disease that kills plants quickly; the only way to control it is to protect against it by spraying the leaves with an approved fungicide such as chlorothalonil or copper, and to keep the garden clean of plant debris.
- You'll also want to be on the lookout for pests. In mid-summer, for example, big green caterpillars called tomato hornworms eat tomato foliage and sometimes damage fruits. One or two hornworms can strip a plant leafless in short order! Deal with pests as soon as you spot them.
- By late summer, plants that began producing early in the season will show signs of exhaustion. With just a little effort, you can extend the life of those sad tomato plants by pruning away withered leaves and branches. Then follow up with liquid plant food and treatments for leaf diseases or insects, if needed.
- Check out [our article on Tomato Quirks](#) for more troubleshooting information



Jalapeno Hot Pepper

Named for the town of Jalapa, Mexico, this is the most popular chile pepper in the United States. Jalapeño produces 3-



2-pack
starter plants



19.3 fl oz
pot volume



Medium
heat

[\(/products/jalapeno-hot-pepper\)](#)

\$16.49

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How to Harvest and Store Tomatoes

- As tomatoes begin to ripen, their colour changes from vibrant medium-green to a lighter shade, with faint pink or yellow blushing. These "breakers," or mature green tomatoes, can be chopped into salsas, pickled, or pan-fried into a crispy appetizer. Yet tomato flavours become much more complex as the fruits ripen, so you have good reason to wait. The exact signs of ripeness vary with variety, but in general, perfectly ripe tomatoes show deep colour yet still feel firm when gently squeezed.
- Store picked tomatoes at room temperature indoors, or in a shady place outside. Never refrigerate tomatoes, because temperatures below 55° cause the precious flavour compounds to break down.
- Bumper crops can be frozen, canned, or [dried](#) for future use.

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Tomato plants grow long roots, which is why it's so important to water deeply.



A soaker hose waters a tomato plant well and without waste. Cover with mulch once it's in place.



If you can, choose a spot somewhat protected from wind. This is especially helpful if you're growing indeterminate varieties (like the one on the far right), which will send long branches in every direction.



Tomato blossoms can be temperamental. If it's too cool (below 55°) or too hot (above 90°), the flowers of most varieties will pause from setting fruit until the temperature is back where they like it.



This cluster of tomatoes shows several stages of ripening. Tomatoes ripen to different colors depending on the variety.



These great little yellow cherry tomatoes, which are actually orange at peak flavor, will add color to salads and fresh pasta dishes, if they make it to the table. They are so sweet that they might all get eaten in the meantime. Seriously.



FAQs

Your Plant Tags Say To Plant Tomatoes Deep: Two-Thirds Of The Plant Underground. Is That Really A Good Practice? ^

The Tag Says Full Sun, But In Arizona With Temperatures Reaching Over The 100 Degree Mark, Is That Going To Be An Issue With This Plant? ^

What Is Meant By "Maturity Is Reached In __ Days"? ^

What Size Cage Should I Use For My Tomato Plants? ^

When The Plant Says Full Sun, What Exactly Does That Mean? 

Is It A Good Idea To Always Stake Or Cage My Tomatoes? 

Can I Plant One Tomato Plant In A Five-Gallon Bucket On My Patio? 

How Large Should The Container Be For A Tomato?

What Do The Letters VFFN Stand For In The Names Of Your
Tomatoes? 

Is There Such A Thing As Nematode-Resistant Tomato Plants? 

Should I Be Pruning Off The Lower Branches Of My Tomato Plants? 

How Far Off Of The Ground Should The Lower Branches Be?

Is It True That Pinching Off The Flowers On The Tomato Plant Helps 

It To Produce More Fruit?

I Just Planted My Tomatoes And Found Out That It Is Too Early. 

Should I Put Something Over Them To Protect Them At Night?

What Causes Tomatoes To Turn Black On The Bottom? 

Do I Have To Replant Tomatoes Every Year, Or Do The Plants Come 

Back When The Time Is Right?

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