



# Tips for the Best Homegrown Tomatoes

Pulling a juicy red tomato off the vine can be a gardener's most rewarding experience. With these helpful hints, you can enjoy a bountiful harvest of cultivated or heirloom tomatoes.

## At a Glance

**Planning:** plant tag lists average number of days to maturity; take into account frost dates

**Temperature:** nighttime temperatures above 50 degrees, daytime 60 or above (but below 90)

**Sun:** 6-8 hours direct sun

**Soil: if planted in the ground:** loose, rich, well-drained, amended with compost; **if in a pot:** high quality potting soil, pot should be at least 16" deep, wide enough for growth

**Water:** early morning, water at soil level, avoiding leaves; water regularly & use mulch to conserve moisture

**Fertilizer:** use regularly, except in high heat (above 90 degrees); ask Tagawa staff for recommendations

- **Determinate** (bush) tomatoes are compact and set their fruit within a 2-week period, then decline. Since they set fruit earlier, some gardeners will plant a few of these types for an early crop or for canning.



- **Indeterminate** (vine) tomatoes require pruning and staking. The vines can reach up to 20 feet and produce fruit until the first frost.

## Choosing the Right Tomato Plant: Days to Maturity

- Consider the length of your growing season –from the last spring frost to the first fall frost. In the Denver area, the last spring frost usually occurs by mid-May, and the first fall frost occurs in late September, although this varies from year to year. The days to maturity are listed on all Tagawa tags so you can plan accordingly.

- Although we average around 157 days in our growing season, these are not all "tomato growing" days. Tomatoes need nighttime temperatures above 50 degrees and daytime temperatures below 90 degrees to grow and produce. Varieties bred to withstand cooler nights, such as Stupice, Siberian, Nepal, and Oregon Spring usually do well in our

environment. Most gardeners in our area are successful with early and mid-season tomato varieties, though late season varieties can also be successfully grown in the right environment.

- **Early season varieties** mature from 55-70 days from transplanting. Bush Early Girl and Fourth of July are a few of the early varieties.
- **Mid-season varieties** mature from 70-80 days from transplant and include Champion, Celebrity, Big Girl and Brandywine.



- **Late season varieties** take the longest, 90+ days from transplant. Beefsteak tomatoes fall into this category.
- For a complete list of the varieties carried by Tagawa, ask an employee for the handout which describes flavor, maturity and disease resistance.

### **Sun and Temperature Requirements**

- Tomatoes need 6-8 hours of direct sun. In our climate, a little afternoon shade can be helpful.
- Before planting tomatoes make sure that the nighttime temperatures are above 50° and the daytime temperatures are sustained at 60° or above.
- Make sure the **last spring frost** has occurred and be sure to acclimatize your nursery grown plants before planting.
- Walls-O-Water can be used to extend the growing season and protect tomatoes against the uncertainty of Colorado weather.

### **Best Soil Conditions**

- **Garden Beds** - Plant tomato plant in loose, rich, well-drained soil, preferably amended with good compost. Remove the leaves of the bottom 2/3 of the plant before planting. Dig a trench and lay the plant horizontally into the trench and firm the soil. The top of the plant will aim for the sun, and the buried stem will produce roots in the warmer soil near the surface. This results in a stronger and healthier plant. Stake vining varieties for support.
- It's important to give enough space between tomato plants, at least 3 feet, for adequate air circulation to prevent disease.
- **Patio Containers** – Use a high quality potting soil for best tomato yield. Make sure container is at least 16" deep and wide to accommodate growth. Tomatoes can be staked using a wall, trellis or tomato cage. If you have limited space, consider planting compact varieties such as Patio, Tommy Toe, and Tumbler.

### **Water & Fertilizer for the Best Tomato Plants**

- Water early in the morning at soil level and avoid watering the leaves. Soaker hoses work best because they deliver water directly to the roots.
- To avoid disease and cracks in the fruit, water tomato plant regularly and keep it evenly moist. Mulch will also help your tomato plant retain its moisture.
- Fertilize regularly! Ask a Tagawa employee to recommend the best fertilizer and then maintain a regular fertilization schedule. In extremely high temperatures (over 90°) it's best not to fertilize tomato plants.



## **Disease Control**

- The initials VFNT on a tag are indications of resistance to common tomato diseases. Choose tomato plants with these initials if you've had diseased tomatoes in the past.
- Heirloom tomatoes are more prone to disease than hybrid varieties.
- Do not smoke near your tomato plants and wash your hands before handling tomatoes.
- Stay out of the garden when tomato leaves are wet.
- Because air flow is so critical to keeping disease away, you can remove the bottom 12 inches of foliage once the plant reaches 3 feet.
- Avoid planting tomatoes in the same area if you have had disease problems in the past.

## **Keeping Pests Away from Tomatoes**

- Inspect both foliage and fruit often for signs of unwanted pests. While some pests can be picked off of the leaf, others require more aggressive measures. When in doubt, consult a Tagawa specialist in the Annuals department for diagnosis and remedy.
- Plant "trap" plants near your tomatoes that deter unwanted pests. Some of these include: basil, pot marigold, nasturtium and bee balm.