

Homegrown Tomatoes

A simple guide to growing the best homegrown tomatoes in garden beds or containers



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 for an early crop or for canning.

Indeterminate (vine) tomatoes require pruning and staking. The vines can reach up to 6 or 7 feet and produce fruit throughout the summer until the first frost.

Choosing the Right Tomato Plant

Consider the length of your growing season. We average around 157 days in our growing season, from the last spring frost around mid-May until the first fall frost around late September. This will vary from year to year.

Most gardeners in our area are successful with early and mid-season tomato varieties. Late season varieties can also be grown successfully in the right environment. There are some varieties bred to withstand cooler nights, such as *Stupice*, *Nepal*, and *Oregon Spring*.

The average number of days to maturity for each tomato plant we carry are listed on the plant tags in each pot. Take note that the countdown to the average maturity date begins on the day of planting.

Be sure to acclimate any greenhouse-grown plants to the outdoors for 3-5 days before planting in your garden or container.

- *Early season* varieties mature less than 60 days from transplant.
- *Mid-season* varieties mature from 60-80 days from transplant.
- *Late season* varieties take the longest, 80+ days from transplant.

Sun and Temperature Requirements

Tomatoes need 6-8 hours of direct sun. In our climate, a little afternoon shade can be helpful.

Tomatoes need daytime temperatures consistently above 60° or above, and below 90° to grow and produce. Night temperatures should remain above 50°. Tomatoes may stop setting fruit when temperatures exceed 90°.

Wall o' Water can be used to extend the growing season and protect tomatoes against the uncertainty of Colorado's spring weather.

At a Glance

Check plant tags for average number of days to maturity.

Temperature:

Night - above 50 degrees

Day - 60 or above (but below 90)

Sun: 6-8 hours direct sun

Soil:

In Ground - loose, rich, well-drained, amended with compost

In Containers - 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°)

Best Soil Conditions

Garden Beds: Tomatoes prefer loose, rich, well-drained soil amended with good compost. Remove the leaves from 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, healthier plant. Stake vining varieties for support. Plant tomatoes at least 3 feet apart for adequate air circulation to prevent disease.

Patio Containers: Use a high quality potting soil for the best tomato yield. Make sure the 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*, *Bush Early Girl*, and *Health Kick*.

Water and Fertilizer

Water early in the morning at soil level, avoiding leaves. Soaker hoses work best to deliver water directly to the roots. To avoid disease and cracks in the fruit, water regularly and keep soil evenly moist. Mulch will also help your tomato plant retain its moisture.

Fertilize regularly, except in temperatures above 90° F. Tagawa staff can help you choose the right fertilizer.

Disease Control

The initials VFNT on a tag are indications of resistance to common tomato diseases. Choose plants with these initials if you've had diseased tomatoes in the past. Heirlooms are more prone to disease than hybrid varieties. Avoid planting tomatoes in the same area if you have had disease problems in the past. Stay out of the garden when tomato leaves are wet. Do not smoke near your tomato plants, and wash your hands before handling tomatoes. 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.

Keeping Pests Away

Inspect both foliage and fruit often for signs of unwanted pests. While some pests can be hand-picked off of leaves, others require more aggressive measures. Plant "trap" plants, like basil, pot marigold, nasturtium, and dill near your tomatoes. When in doubt, our Annuals staff is here to help.

Which is the Best Tomato?

The 'best' tomato is a matter of opinion, and varies widely from gardener to gardener, but we have put together a list of varieties that consistently perform well in our area. But don't limit yourself to this list!

Early Season

(< 60 days)

Early Girl
Fourth of July
Stupice
Oregon Spring

Mid-Season

(< 80 days)

Celebrity
Cahmpion
Better Boy

Super Fantastic
Parks Whopper

Late Season

(> 80 days)

Brandywine
Cherokee Purple
Big Boy
Kellogg's Breakfast
Abraham Lincoln

Heirloom

Carmello (75)

Dona (75)
Momotaro (74)
Black Krim (75)

Cherry

Sungold (57)
Chocolate Sprinkles (70)
Sweet 100 (65)
Sun Sugar (62)
Yellow Pear (75)

Paste/Roma

San Marzano (80)

Juliet (60)
La Roma (76)
Amish Paste (85)

Determinate/Small Plants

Health Kick (74)
Mountain Merit (75)
Bush Celebrity (67)
Bush Early Girl (54)
Patio (70)