

TOMATO TIPS

SITE: Plant your tomato in the sunniest area possible where it will get at least 6-8 hours of sunlight to develop leaves and color up fruit. Your plant may grow to be 4-7 feet tall. Brick walls can radiate heat after dark.

Allow shade for afternoon temperatures above 90 degrees. Blossoms may fall and high heat sterilizes pollen!

Allow at least 30-36" diameter for optimal growth. (Think of an adult turning with hands on hips).

IF planting in a container, use large 10-15 gallon size and water often. Supplement or replace its soil annually—most of it will become roots and depleted of nutrients.

TRANSPLANTING: Use a good organic TOMATO supplement, such as Dr. Earth. Yes, you will really need 2-3 cups per plant! Mix with one quarter cup of these dry ingredients: washed chicken pellets, calcium/bone meal/crushed egg shells and gypsum. Include a half cup of worm castings. (Mix in bulk, then set aside some of this mixture for later. Side dress it around the base of the plant in 3-4 months when the plant needs a boost.)

You only need the top few inches of the plant above ground after planting. Remove the lower leaves and soak the root ball in a solution of diluted fish emulsion and seaweed extract before planting.

If the plant is "leggy" dig a shallow trench and plant the seedling at a slight angle. Mix the dry ingredients above with the soil you dug out before filling the hole. The entire stem will then become the root system.

Use a cage for support. IF you plan to drive a stake, do it now. (Do not drive it through the root ball later!)

WATER: 2-3 times over the first hour, allowing at least one gallon per watering per plant. Water at the base of the plant every 2 days for the first 2 weeks, every 3-4 days for the next 4 weeks. Gradually increase the hose's distance from the plant stem--roots will spread outward. The plant's soil wants to be moist and stay fluffy. Do not let it compact or stand on the soil.

The plant is a giant vascular system. If leaves are drooping in the morning, water deeply. Leaves drooping on a hot afternoon are the plant's way to conserve water.

Eventually, you can water deeply every 7 to 10 days. Tomatoes like deep soaks to their roots, not a spray that leaves their leaves wet. Wet foliage can attract diseases including blight spores.

GROWTH: When the plant is 30" high, trim off the bottom 8-12" of leaves to create air flow. Keep plants pruned so that the energy is concentrated in making more fruit rather than foliage.

Once blossoms develop, give each plant a good shake to help blossoms self-fertilize. To maximize your crop, use an electric toothbrush encased in cling-wrap. Apply the back of the vibrating head to each 90-degree blossom elbow for 5-10 seconds. (This technique is used in cold climates with great success.)

FRUIT: Once fruit begins to set, support branches and heavy trusses. Tie them loosely to your tomato cage or stake. Eighth-inch elastic cord comes in spools and does not cut the plants. Support the fruit with pantyhose or plastic produce nets. Avoid tying too tightly and cutting into the stems or stalk.

Fruit is ripe when it feels soft. For best flavor harvest before watering otherwise the fruit will intake the water and become mushy. To avoid bursting, leave the stems on and avoid refrigeration.

Enjoy the process! Enjoy the bounty! And add your own helpful notes for the future!