



Project List:

Tomatoes

Tomatoes are everyone's favorite thing to grow. Here, we have two seasons to get a crop, one in summer, and one in fall. Follow these suggestions for great fruit!

- Compost**—Add more compost to your garden seasonally before every planting.
- Fertilizer**—Foods made for edibles are best. Try **Espoma's Tomato-tone** or **Garden-tone**.
- Liquid Seaweed**—An organic extract that strengthens plants for better resistance to temperature fluctuations, stress, and disease. Good as a drench or foliar spray.
- Tomato Cages**—Tomatoes need support to thrive and produce well.
- Mulch**—Apply at least 2-3 inches of a mulch such as **pinestraw** after planting to conserve moisture, protect your investment in the soil, moderate temperatures, and deter weeds.

This is a basic list to get you started. Speak with a Garden Advisor for specific recommendations.

TIMING: Tomatoes are most popularly planted by 4" transplants, and generally available in a longer spring planting window of late February through March for a summer harvest. Summer plantings yield fall tomatoes when planted in a narrower window, late June through mid-July. You can also start them by seed in January for a summer crop, and in May for the fall harvests.

SELECTION: Plants fall into two main categories:

- **Hybrids** are those bred for specific size, flavor, or other characteristics, and can be the best choices for disease resistance. **Heirlooms** are usually viewed as those that are 50 years or older varieties. These can produce less fruit, but they have unusual forms or colors and distinctive flavor qualities that many prefer. These will also 'come true' from seed.
- Then, choose between two major plant types: **Determinates** are bush-type growers, and generally produce larger fruits that ripen all at once. These can be good for container culture. **Indeterminates** usually have smaller-sized fruit, but these are produced over a much longer time on larger, vining-type plants.

SITE:

- Tomatoes must have full sun; at least 6 hours or more of direct sunlight daily is best.
- Plants will require *consistent* moisture; make sure they're in a spot that is easy to water. Good drainage, air circulation and consistent moisture will help reduce disease problems.

(Continued on reverse)

- **Raised beds** are excellent for growing tomatoes because they provide improved drainage and soil aeration. Beds should be a minimum of 4'x 4' x 1'deep. This will make temperature and moisture levels more consistent.

PREP:

- Try **Mayer's Raised Bed Mix** for an all-in-one soil. Or, amend beds with the **Organic Compost**, and add on **Garden Soil Builder**, a well-composted **manure**, and **worm castings** before each planting. In containers, try **NHG's Organic Potting Soil**, and amend. *See the Vegetable Project List [handout for details](#).*
- Work the organic vegetable fertilizer into the soil when you're prepping the area at 1 to 2 lbs per 100 sq. ft.

PLANT:

- At planting, water the transplants with **liquid seaweed** or **root stimulator**.
- Make the hole. Fertilizer can be applied now at the bottom *with soil added on top*, or done after planting. Carefully clip any lower leaves of taller plants, and bury a couple of inches of the main stem under the soil. Additional roots will grow from the stem.
- Thoroughly water the plant in. Apply fertilizer in a ring around plant now if not done in the hole.
- Apply 2-3 inches of a **shredded bark** or **pine needle mulch** after planting to conserve moisture on the new planting.

CULTURE:

- **Cage** your tomatoes right after planting to provide protection and necessary support. Make sure any support you select is tall enough for the mature chosen variety.
- Water in the morning to reduce fungal diseases. Drip irrigation works well as it keeps water off the leaves. Work around leaves only when they are dry. Keep tools clean.
- Do not fertilize again until the first fruits have started to develop, and reapply every two weeks thereafter. Remember containers will need additional watering and fertilization.
- Carefully monitor your plants daily for any appearance of pests or diseases.

HARVEST:

- Gently twist to remove fruit that has reached its deepest color, and store upside-down unrefrigerated until needed. Green fruits can be harvested as well, and if desired can be allowed to ripen indoors on a warm windowsill.

See a Garden Advisor for additional help to be the most successful with tomatoes.

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