

Growing Tomatoes

What better way to add to delicious summer salads than by growing your own juicy, mouth-watering tomatoes. The versatile tomato plant can be grown almost anywhere there's sunshine for all or most of the day - in planters, pots, even hanging baskets, on patios, windowsills, balconies, and of course, in the garden.

Some tomatoes are huge beefsteak types with firm yet tender flesh. Others are bite-sized cherry tomatoes that the children enjoy in their lunch boxes. Then, there are those tangy red ones, especially good for canning and ketchup. Golden yellow tomatoes of all types add their own mellow flavor.

Start out with professionally grown plants from Johnson's, or grow your own starting from seed, sown between the middle of March and first weeks of April. If plants are purchased before the last frost-free date, condition by placing them outside in a sheltered place for a few days before planting and bring them in at night. Keep their young roots moist by watering every day. Plant them outdoors as soon as the danger of frost has passed. If there is an unexpected late freeze, cover the young plants at night with paper or light-weight cloth.

Any average garden soil will grow tomatoes, and whatever you do to improve it will be amply rewarded by larger and more plentiful fruits. Diseases can build up in the soil so tomatoes should not be planted in the same location in the garden for more than two years in a row.

Tomatoes usually ripen 10-12 weeks after planting. Here are a few secrets to tomato growing success:

- * Plant in an area that will receive strong, direct sunlight at least 6 hours a day. Do not set your plants out until all danger of frost has passed. Since diseases can build up in the soil, tomatoes should not be planted in the same location for more than two years in a row – move them around in your garden.
- * Several weeks before planting, prepare the soil by loosening the top 8 to 10 inches. Mix 2 to 3 inches of organic material such as Bumper Crop, LeafGro, or compost into the top 4 to 6 inches of soil.
- * Mix in a good general garden fertilizer at the recommended rate. Once your plants are growing well, fertilize with a water-soluble, all-purpose fertilizer every 4 to 6 weeks. Organic gardeners can use Liquid Fish Emulsion, Liquid Kelp, Dried Blood, or Bone Meal. Do not overfeed. A little is good - a lot is NOT better!
- * Plant tomatoes in the evening or on a cloudy day to help keep the plants from wilting. Before planting, fill the holes with water and let it soak in. Bury the stems. Plant your seedlings up to the first true leaves. Pack the soil loosely around the plant and leave a slight sunken area around each plant.
- * Don't crowd your seedlings - give them room to branch out. Plant 18 to 24 inches apart in the row and space the rows 3 to 4 feet apart. This also is the time to place the stakes or cages on the plant - waiting until later may damage the roots.
- * Mulch the tomatoes with 2 to 3 inches of organic material. Mulching helps stop weed growth and water loss from the soil.

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- * Water deeply and regularly - once a week or every 5 days in hot weather. Water directly on the soil, not the leaves so that fungal diseases won't get a start.
- * Pinch and remove suckers that develop in the crotch joint of two branches. They won't bear fruit and will take energy away from the rest of the plant.
- * When the tomato plants are about 3 feet tall, remove the leaves from the bottom foot of the stem. These are usually the first leaves to develop fungus problems.

Johnson's carries a wide variety of vigorous, healthy tomato plants and seeds, as well as everything you need to successfully grow your own tomato crop!

<i>Days to Harvest</i>	<i>Size</i>	<i>Ind. or Det.</i> <i>Disease Resistant</i>	<i>Comments</i>
Beefmaster 80 days	1-2 lbs	Ind. DR	High yield; red & meaty; good for slicing and sauces
Beefsteak 90 days *Heirloom	14 oz	Ind.	Continuous harvest to frost; red ribbed fruit; great slicer
Betterboy 70-75 days	1 lb	Ind. DR	Best large tomato; great taste; firm & meaty; very productive
Big Beef 73 days *Heirloom	1 lb	Ind. DR	Outstanding producer; no cracking; very good flavor; high yield to frost
Big Boy 78 days	10 oz	Ind.	Heavy producer to frost; vigorous plant with heavy foliage
Big Girl 78 days	1 lb	Ind. Crack res.	Continuous harvest to frost; big red fruit; tasty
Brandywine 75-100 days *Heirloom	8-16 oz	Ind.	Rosy-pink fruit; tender flesh; old Amish
Celebrity 67 days	8 oz	Det. DR	Medium glossy fruit; firm flesh; heavy yield; excellent flavor
Early Girl 52 days	5 oz.	Ind.	Best of the early producers
Large Red Cherry 70-80 days	1-1/4"	Ind.	High yield to frost; sweet flavor

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