

PLANTING AND CARING FOR TOMATOES

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NOTE:-If you are a smoker, wash hands before handling tomatoes-you can pass a virus called tobacco mosaic.

-Either start tomatoes early-March or April inside house under lights OR buy from nurseries as starters to transplant in mid May. We need all the help we can get in getting starting them as we have a short season.

1. **IMPROVE SOIL-Amend soil in each hole** before putting plants in. Add lots of compost, yum-yum mix, a little mushroom compost, or composted horse or chicken manure, 1 tablespoon epsom salt (the bath type) I also add 1 TLB dry milk-adds calcium. Mix up with soil.

If growing from seedlings or nursery starters, **harden plants off a few hours for a couple of days** before transplanting them outside.

2. Pinch off lower leaves and **plant tomatoes as deep as possible**. They will grow roots along buried stem and become stronger. Make well around each tomato so water stays close to root zone. Add straw all around bottom of plant after soil has warmed. This will help keep the water from evaporating and will keep water from splashing soil on them. Splashing soil on tomatoes can allow soil borne viruses to get into plant. If you plant before last frost date, use wall of waters to protect them from cold nights. You should use bamboo stakes to help keep wall of waters open as they can blow over with our spring winds.

3. Add water and **THRIVE AND SEAWEED** in bucket and water well when **first** planting outside.

4. Use bamboo stakes and tie up plant. Change out to bigger stakes as plants grow. Cage plants as they grow or tie to tall stake. I use 5' green t-posts for stakes and also make cages out of concrete reinforcement wire.

5. After plants have been transplanted for about 2 weeks, **FERTILIZE with FISH EMULSION and SEA-WEED**. This should be in early June. Fertilize again in July (2-3 times during the season). Too much fertilizer makes large plants but plant will not produce as many tomatoes.

Don't rush to plant if still cold. **Plant in wall of waters in morning to heat up soil and plant by evening**. If plants or **leaves turn purple**, it means the ground is too cold and the plant can't take up phosphorus. **Add rock phosphate to help them turn green again**.

Train tomatoe plant to one or two stems, don't let them have many stems at bottom. Allowing multiple stems I use a small t-post to tie my caged up to it as plant gets promotes more green growth but takes away from fruit production.

6. **Pinch off suckers**. They grow between the main vine and side branches. They take energy away from the fruit. Do not pinch off blossoms.

7. **Pinch off, cut off or tie up any branches that touch ground**. Tomatoes can get soil borne diseases from touching ground.

If using one of my wire cages, I use a small 3' t-post to **tie my cage** up to it as plant gets bigger. This really helps to prevent the plants from blowing over in our wind.

Water consistently throughout season. The main reason tomatoes get cracks is uneven watering. The most efficient method of watering is by a drip system.

8. Cut off with clean scissors any diseased branches as season goes on. **Clean scissors between plants with alcohol to disinfect** so as not to pass disease to other plants. Severely diseased plants take out and through in trash **not compost pile**.