

Growing Tomatoes



Starting From Seed

Tomato seeds should be started indoors the 1st week of March. Use warm, seed starting mix planting seeds 1/4 to 1/2 inch deep. Seeds require at least 8 hrs. of sunlight a day to germinate in 10 to 14 days. For more info see our Starting Seeds Indoors Fact Sheet. Once the plant has developed to the size shown in fig.1 below, gently transplant to a depth that leaves only 3/4 of the plant above ground. (fig.2)



Figure 1



Figure 2

Soil Preparation

Tomatoes need soil needs with good drainage and nutrition. Typically, Colorado soil is hard, alkaline clay. Augment native soil with BOSS and peat moss for drainage.

Use compost, organic materials and sulfates to improve nutrition and bring the pH level up to the desired 6 to 6.8. You can test this with home soil test kits. Taking the time to properly prepare the soil will greatly improve harvest.



Container Planting

Container planting is a great solution for limited space.

Most tomato varieties can be used, though smaller tomatoes typically result in greater success. For best results, use pots with a diameter of at least 18 in. Remember that all container tomatoes will require more water and fertilizer than those grown in gardens

Planting

Plants should be moved outside after the last average frost date. Significant growth will begin when night temperatures stay around 50° F. To plant, remove all branches from the bottom one fourth of the plant and place in the dirt as shown in fig.2 at left. (all parts of the plant below the ground will produce roots and strengthen the plant) Try to plant at least 2 tomatoes within 4 feet of each other for pollination. Mulching after planting will help warm the soil in the spring and hold the water in the summer. Finally, place tomato cage over plant keeping in mind your tomato should reach a height of 4 to 6 feet and width of 2 to 3 feet.

Watering

Watering should always be done in the cool of the morning or evening. Test with finger appx.1 inch into dirt. Watering is needed when the soil is still slightly moist. Never evaluate the condition of the plant in the heat of the day as they typically will look stressed regardless of soil moisture. It is important to water based on need not day of the week. Tomatoes rarely need daily watering.

Fertilization

Fertilizing should be done every 2 weeks. Use higher nitrogen until mid-June. Use lower nitrogen for the rest of the summer to promote fruit rather than plant growth. Always follow product instructions. One excellent tomato fertilizer is **Espoma Tomato Tone**. **Tomato Tone** has a complex blend of natural organic material that is ideal for organic gardening. Every two weeks, apply 3 tablespoons of **Tomato Tone** to each tomato plant.

