

Growing Tips 2

PLANTING TOMATOES



Plant tomatoes and - presto! – a garden. Whether in a pot, patch, or plot – tomatoes capture the essence of summer. Follow a few simple steps for a bountiful crop.

Seeds or seedlings?

Plan ahead if you want to start your own seeds – they'll need daily care to maintain the right conditions of moisture, light and warmth! Plant seeds **6 – 8 weeks before the estimated last frost date** in your area.

Tomato seedlings arrive in garden centers in a dazzling array of varieties that produce particular colors, shapes, sizes and tastes. To get started, **select tried and true varieties** that reliably produce quality, disease-resistant, tasty crops in your area.

Choose plants with straight, sturdy stems about the thickness of a pencil. Look for plants with 4 – 6 true leaves an even shade of green, free of insects and spots.

Seedlings in cell packs or individual pots will establish quickly after planting.

Sun and Soil

Choose a **sunny, warm location** and plant **after the last spring frost** in your area when temperatures *average* at least 55 - 60°F.

Tomatoes thrive in any well-drained soil with moderate fertility, and a pH of 6 -7.

Prepare the soil.

For an excellent start, **test your soil** and amend as necessary. Use a general-purpose fertilizer or choose organic amendments such as blood, bone, fish or feather meal. → See **Growing Tips 18** Planting a Vegetable Garden

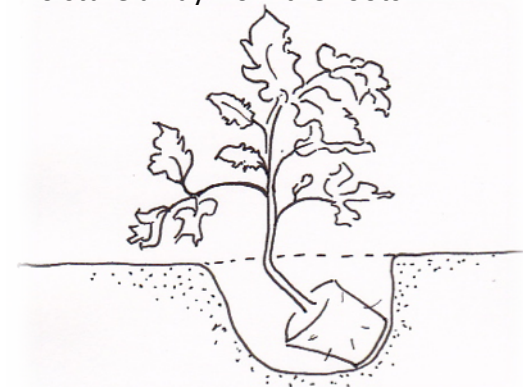
Add organic matter, such as compost, aged manure, leaf mold or coffee grounds.

Stake, cage or mulch?

- **Decide whether you will stake, cage** or allow plants to run on **mulch**. Staked tomatoes produce cleaner fruit that ripens earlier, but must be pruned, and tied to the stake. Caged or mulched plants don't need pruning.
- **Set wooden stakes 4' – 5' tall, before you plant** to avoid injuring the young seedlings.
- **Install cages right after planting** – most tomatoes require large, 24" diameter cages, 4' – 5' high; center carefully over the plants.
- **Plant seedlings** in rows 3' apart with 18" between plants in the row if you stake or cage. If you will **mulch**, space rows 4' – 5' apart, with 3' between plants.

How to Plant

1. **Water the seedlings thoroughly**, preferably with a solution of soluble fertilizer and water, about 1/2 hour before you plant.
2. **Mark** out where you will plant each seedling and dig a hole a few inches bigger than the root ball of the plant. Tear the rim off peat pots so that it won't wick moisture away from the roots.



3. **Set plants in the holes** with the first set of **true leaves** just above the soil line. Roots will develop along buried stems.
4. **Cover the root ball and stem with soil.** Press down gently to eliminate air pockets.
5. **Water the new transplants immediately** with **2 quarts water**. Allow the water to soak down to the roots.

Wait until the soil is thoroughly warm and plants are well established **before you mulch.**



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