



How to Grow Prize-Winning Tomatoes

Everything tastes better when you raise it yourself. Growing your own tomatoes allows you to enjoy the fruits of your labor. Gardeners love to compete with other gardeners in their quest for growing the LARGEST tomato! For prize-winning tomatoes follow these recommendations.

WHERE TO PLANT

Choose an area that receives 6-8 hours of sunlight per day, located away from trees and plants that will compete for water and nutrients.

SOIL PREPARATION

For the biggest tomatoes and healthiest plants, make sure the soil has been prepared properly before planting. Tomatoes prefer a slightly acidic soil (6.5-7) but will grow in a wider range of pH.

Soils in this area have low levels of natural organic matter. For optimum growth, organic material should be added every time you work the soil. We recommend working **Cotton Burr Compost** into the soil. A 2 cu. ft. bag will cover approximately 12 sq. ft., 2 ins. deep; enough area for 3-4 tomato plants.

FERTILIZER

Tomatoes always benefit from a liquid starter fertilizer for initial plant development. This feeding is very important in the development of the plant. We recommend **ferti•lome Blooming & Rooting**. This high phosphorus water soluble fertilizer, used at transplant time, will increase yields over 50% more than yields without.

A slower release granular food, like **FoxFarm Happy Frog Tomato and Vegetable**, or **Natural Guard Natural and Organic Tomato & Vegetable Food**, will keep plants healthy and producing all season. Both are natural and contain calcium which helps prevent blossom end rot.

HOW TO PLANT

Before planting your tomato plants, harden them off outdoors for a few days. Place in an area protected from direct sun and strong winds. Remember to keep them well watered during the hardening-off process.

Tomato plants can be planted deeper than their container. Firm the soil well around the root system. Or, you may prefer the trench method. When ready to plant, pinch off all leaf stems up to the top cluster. Dig a trench long enough to lay the plant stem in with the leaf cluster pointed up. Cover the stem and root ball with soil leaving only the leaf cluster above the soil line. This method of planting will allow your tomato plant to set roots all along the planted stem.

After planting, sprinkle **Hi-Yield Herbicide Granules** on top of the soil to prevent weeds from germinating.

MULCH

Use mulch to discourage weeds and to keep the soil moist longer. You can use straw, or use **Cotton Burr Compost** and work it into the soil at the end of the season.

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...Grow Prize-Winning Tomatoes

STAKING

Keep stems and leaves off the ground by staking or caging tomatoes. This is also a good way to prevent the spread of disease. If you are using a tomato cage, make sure it's large enough to support the plant later in the summer.

The recommended date to start planting tomatoes is around mid April to early May. BUT...if you want to get a head start for an earlier tomato harvest...there are several things you can do. One trick is to, after adding soil amendments, lay out a sheet of black or red plastic to trap heat and warm the soil.

PROBLEMS & SOLUTIONS

- **Blossom Drop** - Use a tomato set spray, like **ferti•lome Tomato & Pepper Set**, to help set fruit on your tomatoes during periods of high temperature (above 90°), low temperature (below 55°) and high or low humidity. Don't count on 100% results. Many times it takes a change in the weather. Shade cloth may help in high temperatures.
- **Poor Fruit Color** - High heat prevents pigment from forming. Pick tomatoes and let ripen indoors.
- **Blossom-End Rot** - Caused by calcium deficiency and/or fluctuations in moisture. Add **Hi-Yield Calcium Nitrate** when planting and 2 weeks later. Use drip irrigation or a mulch to sustain an even water supply to the plant. Use **ferti•lome Yield Booster** to help prevent blossom-end rot. It is a high-calcium foliar food that increases fruit size and helps prevent blossom-end rot. Tomatoes also benefit from having gypsum worked into the soil at planting time.
- **Cracking** - Caused by fluctuation in water available to plant. Choose crack-resistant plant varieties. Mulch plants and use drip irrigation.
- **2,4-D Damage** - Tomato plants are susceptible to 2,4-D damage. Do not spray for lawn or garden weeds when it is hot and/or windy. If your neighbors spray for weeds—even three houses away—that, too, can affect your tomato plants.

PESTS—INSECTS

- **Spider Mites** - **Natural Guard Neem** or **ferti•lome Triple Action** are combination products that will control disease, insects and mites on vegetables and ornamentals. Keep a careful watch out for mites and spray before it becomes a big problem.
- **Aphids** - Usually seen in spring. Easy to control with **Hi-Yield Indoor/Outdoor Broad Use Insecticide** or **ferti•lome Triple Action**.
- **Hornworms** - Use **Spinosad**. Spinosad is contained in **Natural Guard Bagworm Tent Caterpillar & Chewing Insect Control** and **Bonide Captain Jack's Dead Bug Brew**. Remove the hornworms by hand if you see them.

PESTS—DISEASE

- **Blight, Leaf Spot** - Spray with **Natural Guard Copper Soap Fungicide** or **ferti•lome Broad Spectrum Fungicide**. Mulches also help control spread of disease. Stake plants or use tomato cages. Plant resistant varieties. Rotate crops.

Please read and follow label directions.

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