

TOMATO SEEDS

While commonly considered a vegetable, tomatoes are actually a fruit since we eat the fleshy portion of the plant which contains the seeds. Because of the rarity of good tasting store-bought tomatoes, a ripe home-grown tomato is a garden treasure beyond price. In fact, ripe, juicy tomatoes are so desirable that over 90 percent of gardeners grow at least one tomato plant. Fortunately for those wanting home-grown tomatoes, the plants are quite easy to raise. The process begins with the purchase of quality seeds and continues as follows.

STARTING YOUR SEEDS

1. Select your growing container. Plants can be started in a variety of containers including 1" seed trays, small peat pots or even repurposed plastic yogurt cups with a drain hole punched in the bottom.
2. Select a light potting soil, preferably a "seed starting" mix if available and fill your containers within 1/4" of the top.
3. Select a plant out date (the date you will transplant your tomato plants into your outdoor garden). It should be after the last expected frost in your area when the average nighttime temperature remains 50 degrees or above. In Colorado a good range is from May 20th -May 31st. However, if you plant out in June or early July, you should still be able to enjoy great home-grown tomatoes.
4. Six to eight weeks before the desired plant out date, plant your seeds 1/4" deep in your potting soil. Quality seeds have a high germination rate, so two seeds per pot will almost always assure that each pot will produce at least one plant. Water thoroughly but gently so as to not disturb the seeds. Continue to keep the potting soil moist but not soggy.
5. Place the pots in a warm sunny location. The seeds will germinate best with soil temperatures between 70 and 80 degrees. Germination usually takes between 7 to 14 days. After sprouting, seedlings grow best at temperatures between 60 and 70 degrees.
6. When the plants begin to develop their first pair of true leaves, thin to one plant per pot. Keep the strongest seedling.
7. If you are using small containers, such as 1" seed trays, carefully transplant the seedlings to 4" to 6" pots when the plants have two sets of true leaves.



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TOMATO PLANTS

TRANSPLANTING

1. Seven days before your desired plant out date, begin to “harden off” your plants by setting them outside during the day in a shady, sheltered spot that is protected from wind and sun. The next day begin to slowly introduce them to the conditions in which they will actually grow. Start with 15 minutes on the first day and gradually increase the time each day.
2. On your scheduled plant out date, transplant your hardened off plants to the garden by digging a hole that is deep enough to cover all but the top set of leaves. Snip off the leaves below the top set. Be very careful not to damage the last remaining set of leaves. If not using plantable peat pots, gently remove the seedling from its container without disturbing its roots, place the seedling in the hole and gently backfill around it and water it in. If the day is predicted to be sunny, plant them early in the morning or late in the day to limit transplant stress. A cloudy day is ideal.

CARE & HARVESTING

1. During the growing season, water such that the soil is kept evenly moist.
2. As the plants grow, trellis as needed to keep the plants off the ground and remove all weeds around and near the plants.
3. The ground around the plants can be mulched with straw, lawn clippings or the like to prevent it from drying out too quickly.
4. The application of water soluble fertilizers during the growing season will help assure good fruit production.
5. Do not pick the fruit until it is fully ripe for best flavor and nutrition.

ENJOY YOUR HARVEST!



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