



Tips for Growing Tomatoes

There is nothing like a tomato picked from the vine and appearing at the dinner table the same day. Slice it, sprinkle it with little salt and pepper, some fresh basil, mozzarella and a little balsamic and that's all I need for lunch.

If you only want to eat fresh tomatoes, generally two plants per person should give you enough. If you are also planning to can or freeze them, four plants per person should give you enough for sauces and cooking in the winter. Remember that the determinate types produce early in the season and then die. The indeterminate types produce fruit later but will last until frost.

But what can you do to make sure you get the best harvest, don't have trouble with blossom end rot, and don't have to share your tomatoes with birds, insects or ground squirrels? When choosing plants, look for healthy, dark green leaves. Yellow or dried foliage could be a sign of problems.

Try to choose plants that have not gotten too tall. You want good solid stems. Tall lanky tomato

plants may have trouble supporting their fruit. If you are getting to the garden center late this year and the plants have already started to flower, remove the flowers before planting.



There's nothing like the taste of tomato picked fresh from the garden.

Fusarium and verticillium wilt will kill tomatoes and are very difficult to eliminate. The way to avoid these is to get disease resistant varieties. VFNT or any combination of these letters after the cultivar name indicates resistance to Verticillium, Fusarium, Nematodes (a nother menace) and/or Tobacco virus. Like humans, tomatoes need calcium to grow. Amending the soil with a calcium supplement like Fertilome's Yield Booster when planting is one way to accomplish this.

Tomatoes need about an inch of water a week. Water deeply twice a week versus light sprinkles

every day. Deep watering makes their roots go deep. Uneven moisture can cause a calcium deficiency resulting in blossom end rot. Bonide's Rot Stop can be sprayed directly onto the plant if blossom end rot occurs.

Another preventative technique is to use an Earth Box. These have several advantages—warmer soil earlier (it's like a raised garden); even moisture—you water through a tube and the water reservoir keeps the soil evenly moist; a black plastic cap holds moisture in and keeps weeds out; and for those with only decks or patios, a great alternative to pots.

Cracking of the skin is another common problem. Most times this is a result of heavy rain or watering and then a hot, dry spell. So far the dry spell hasn't been an issue this year but the rain certainly has. Another plus for the Earth Box with that black plastic cap keeping unneeded water out.

Tomatoes need to be staked. You can buy wire cages at most garden centers. You can also do a more natural look with wood stakes that are at least an inch in diameter.

Fertilize with a 5-10-5 fertilizer bird bath handy will give them an tomatoes as having a high once established and again a alternate source. As for insects, if acidity. However, for canning month later. Earth boxes have they become a problem, an purposes it is recommended by timed release fertilizer and insecticidal soap is a good choice the USDA to add 2 tablespoons calcium included. (Have I men- and if any of the larger pests of lemon juice per quart of tioned how much I like Earth enter your garden, hand picking tomatoes and to use a pressure Boxes?) is usually sufficient to eliminate canner to minimize the possibility of any food borne illness.

Bird and critter problems? Bird netting is just about the only Pick tomatoes when they are at Whether it's with salt and solution for keeping them out, their ripest for immediate eating. pepper, cinnamon and sugar, or and you will have to wrestle with Green tomatoes can be stored your favorite recipe it will soon be it to harvest your tomatoes. Most but should be kept out of light. If the season to enjoy those of the time they are going for the you are preserving tomatoes, delectable fruits of summer. moisture from the tomato vs. the freezing is generally safer than vitamin C content so keeping a canning. We often think of