

What Every Tomato Likes



SITE SELECTION

Full sun is what I like...all the day, right up to night. I'll give you some fruit, no matter how little sun you give me, but warm and sunny will get you my best production. Please don't plant me where tomatoes of previous years have had symptoms of disease. If possible, wait three or four years before planting tomatoes, or their relatives such as peppers or eggplants, in that spot. **SOIL PREPARATION** If drainage is good I often do best with only a generous application of homemade compost mixed well into the planting area. Too much nitrogen can make me "fat", I'll produce more foliage at the expense of fruit.

PLANTING

You can either transplant me directly into the ground or into a larger container in a warm, protected, sunny location for 2-3 more weeks after purchasing me as a seedling in a 4" pots.

- Harden me off, gradually acclimating me to outdoor conditions, for 4-7 days before transplanting me into the ground in first couple of weeks of May.
- Remove my lower leaves and plant deeper than I was in my original container. It works well to lay me horizontally in my planting hole so my stem is 2"- 4" beneath soil with just my growing tip above ground. My roots will form at leaf nodes, which are where leaves had been or are growing.

SUPPORTING ME

Provide hefty support if I'm an indeterminate (tall) type. Example: a 5'-6' tall cage made of concrete reinforcing wire with 6" mesh so your hands can reach the my ripe fruit. By making varying diameters such as 18", 20" and 22" they can be nested one inside the other for neater storage. These cages will need to be further supported with a h4 stake such as rebar or a 2" x 2" wood at least 4' tall pounded in next to cage and wired to it. Put the cage on soon after planting so it is easy to get over plant.

- Bush or determinate types may need no support or just the lightweight 3' tall cages widely available.
- Semi-determinate types, which usually reach about 4' tall, will do fine in the mediumweight 4' tall tomato cages, the bottoms of which are just pushed into the ground.
- Another great, easy way to support tomatoes is by pounding in 7' metal T-stakes about 6' apart and stretching the concrete reinforcing wire flat like a fence between the stakes. As the tomatoes grow, you weave the tomato foliage into the fence.

HELPING ME TO GROW

Irrigate about twice a week during the early part of the season, reducing water by as much as 50% as my fruit begins to ripen to reduce cracking and subsequent rot and to intensify flavor.

- Pinch off small side shoots in leaf axils before they are 6" long when necessary to reduce overcrowding in cage.
- Pinch all growth that goes more than a foot above cage so it doesn't flop over and shade out rest of plant.

MOST COMMON PROBLEMS

Most common and still least recognized is the tomato russet mite which causes plants to get dead leaves starting at bottom of plant and moving upwards. Stem takes on a bronzy appearance. It is easy to control with application of a wettable sulfur mixed in a pump up sprayer with a spreader sticker and applied to entire plant including undersides of leaves and deep into the interior of the plant. Sulfur should not be applied if temperature is expected to be above 90°F.

AND FINALLY

Give me a little love each day, let a tomato hornworm or two enjoy me a little(their moths are beautiful), and share my delicious fruit with your friends at harvest time.