

## Growing Tomatoes, Part 2

Tomatoes thrive with water, especially in the early days. Make sure to give them enough that the water soaks deep into the soil. This will ensure the plants get enough water immediately but will also encourage their roots to follow the water deep into the soil, helping the plants stay hydrated later.

Avoid extreme fluctuations in soil moisture. These conditions increase blossom end rot (early) and cracking (late). Mulching will help with even soil moisture and discourage weeds.

As your plants grow, they will likely require support. Some tomatoes are “determinant” and grow into a shrub only a few feet tall. Many others are “indeterminate,” however, and will continue to grow like a vine until cold weather arrives.

For these motivated climbers you will need a tomato cage or other device such as stakes and trellises. You can use a few stakes placed in a circle around the plant, with loose string or plant tape strung between them. This structure provides enough support while also allowing easy harvest.

Tomatoes are self-pollinated, so it's possible to get fruit while growing only one plant. The pollen still needs to move from one flower to the next, though. To be sure this happens, give your plants a light shake every morning.

Healthy, vigorous transplants should not require additional fertilizer until flowering and fruit set are under way. Excessive nitrogen fertilizer will result in too much vine growth, delay flowering and attract pests. As fruit appear, add nitrogen fertilizer every 4 to 6 weeks. Follow instructions on fertilizer bag.

Experiment and find what practices work best in your garden. With hard work and a little luck, you will be on the path to a bountiful harvest.

Next week, Tomato Disease and Pests.

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