



Ventura Garden to Table Series – Tomatoes

Recap from the “Tomato Talk – Growing Perfect Tomatoes” class. Tomatoes are in the *Solanaceae* (Nightshade) family. They are either determinate (bush) or indeterminate (vine) and are heirloom or hybrid – they need a lot of sun (minimum 6 hours). Also, be sure to check out the other Garden to Table Series handouts on the Ventura County Master Gardeners website for additional information.

Heirloom vs. Hybrid

- **Heirloom** – open-pollinated; seeds saved stay true to type. Unique flavors and shapes; fruit can vary in size – less uniform in yield and ripening time.
- **Hybrid** – cross-pollinated; seeds saved do not grow true to type. Bred for disease resistance, uniformity in appearance, and higher yields – generally more productive for home gardens.

Tomatoe Types and Varieties to Consider

Overview – cucumbers fall into three main categories: slicing (fresh eating), pickling, and specialty types.

- **Beefsteak** - a type of tomato rather than a variety, usually large, irregular shaped with solid flesh, and known for its large size.
 - **Brandywine** – heirloom, large pink fruit. It is considered among the best tasting.
 - **Big Beef** – hybrid, produces bright red, large tomatoes (10-16 ounces), known for their rich tomato flavor and disease resistance.
 - **Celebrity** – hybrid, known for its firm, juicy, and sweet-tangy flavor, and its ability to produce 20 or more fruits per plant.
 - **Cherokee Purple** – heirloom, large dark purple, superb sweet flavor.
- **Roma/Paste (plum)** – elongated, egg-shaped form, meaty texture, and low water content, ideal for cooking, canning, and making sauces or paste.
 - **San Marzano** – heirloom, a classic Italian paste tomato known for its thick flesh, rich flavor, and suitability for canning and making sauces. Variety originating from the volcanic soils around Mount Vesuvius in Italy.
 - **Roma VF** – a popular paste tomato variety, is known for its resistance to Verticillium wilt and Fusarium wilt (VF). determinate.
 - **Amish Paste** – heirloom, juicy, meaty flesh, mild, sweet flavor, and suitability for canning, sauces, and even fresh slicing. Indeterminate.
- **Standard (globe)** – produce fruit ranging from a few ounces each to very large tomatoes, typically round, smooth, with a thick skin, good for slicing.
 - **Early Girl** – hybrid, indeterminate, early-ripening, medium-sized, F1, abundant fruit with meaty flesh, suitable for slicing.
 - **Early Wonder** – heirloom, determinate, early-ripening, rich, old-fashioned flavor, making it suitable for sandwiches, and slicing.
 - **Stupice** – Czech heirloom, indeterminate, early maturity, high yields, sweet, complex flavor (balance of sweet and acidic). Good for cooler (coastal) climate.
- **Cherry** – small, fruit with plants ranging in size from dwarf to over 6’ tall.
 - **Sun Gold** – indeterminate, ripens early, sweet flavor, golden-orange fruit in large clusters.



- **Sweet 100** – indeterminate, scarlet, cherry-sized fruit, long clusters, sugary flavor. Do well on patio or in hanging basket.
- **Black Cherry** – indeterminate, vigorous and very productive, rich, sweet, and intense flavor with a good balance of sweetness and acidity.
- **Container** – midget, patio, dwarf, or bush varieties are ideal for small-space gardening – usually short-lived, producing crops quickly over short period.
 - **Patio Choice Yellow** – determinate, popular award-winning cherry tomato, known for its bright yellow fruit and high production.
 - **Patio** – hybrid, determinate, produces delicious, approximately 4 oz. fruits with attractive dark green rugose foliage.
 - **Dwarf Blazing Beauty** – indeterminate, orange tomato, with a tangy flavor, vigorous mid-season.
 - **Prairie Fire** – indeterminate, sweet fruit that is 3” long. Great for a hanging basket.
 - **Better Bush** – determinate, high yield, juicy scarlet tomatoes about 4” good for slicing.
 - **Super Bush** – determinate, juicy full-sized sweet fruit.
 - **Lizzano** – determinate, low growing, cherry tomato ideal for hanging baskets and containers, known for its non-stop harvest of 1” fruits.
- **Heirloom** – usually open-pollinated, usually indeterminate, variety that has been passed down for at least 50 years or was commercially introduced before 1940.
 - **Yellow Pear** – small, yellow fruits that have a tangy, almost citrus flavor. Fruits are shaped like a pear with a thin neck and bulb at the bottom.
 - **Green Zebra** – chartreuse tomato with deep lime-green stripes, bright green flesh and very rich-tasting, sweet, and has a sharp bite.
 - **Mortgage Lifter** – indeterminate, large, smooth, 1lb pink fruit, rich sweet taste.
 - Southern California.

Basic Care: QR code will take you to the Soil to Sprouts slide deck on the Ventura County Master Gardener website.

- **Seeds or Transplant** – both work but transplants give an earlier harvest. If buying transplants, look for multiple plants in a container.
- **Mulch the Soil Surface** – apply a 3–4-inch layer of mulch to retain moisture and keep soil temperature stable.
- **Watering** – water deeply and consistently; keep soil evenly moist especially during flowering and fruit set. Overhead watering can promote disease, prefer drip irrigation.
- **Support** – indeterminate are natural climbers – a trellis, cage, or stake improves air circulation, reduces disease, makes harvesting easier, and saves space.
- **Fertilizer** – use a general purpose (10-10-10) fertilizer at planting. High nitrogen fertilizer encourages leafy growth at the expense of fruit – reduce nitrogen once vines begin flowering.
- **Raised Beds or Containers?** – determinate varieties are best for containers. Use potting soil or a blend of compost/topsoil/vermiculite.



Transplanting:



- If multiple plants – separate by soaking and gently pulling apart. Water thoroughly before setting out, and it is best to plant in late afternoon.
- Space plants 2 to 3 feet apart.
- Roots will form on buried portion of stem – for extra roots - pinch off lower leaves and plant as seen in Figure 1.
- Removing the first and second flower cluster as soon as they appear will result in a better overall fruit set.

When to Harvest:

- Harvest when fruits reach the **desired color for the variety**.
- Use a sharp knife or pruning shears to cut the stem – do not pull or twist, which can damage the vine.
- Store at room temperature. Never refrigerate.
- Tomatoes are **not suitable for long-term storage** – preserve by freezing, canning, or pickling.

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