

## **TOMATOES**

Tomatoes are America's favorite homegrown vegetable, and with good reason. Tomatoes are very productive, easy to grow, do well in all climates and locations, and can produce a good crop with surprising little attention.

All tomatoes are warm-weather or summer growers, there are two basic types of plants-bush types and vining types. The bush varieties are called determinate. Each stem produces a flower cluster at the end and stops growing, so these plants do not grow very tall. The fruits ripen all at once. The majority of the popular tomato varieties are of the vining or indeterminate type, meaning that the plant keeps growing and producing from its first fruit until frosty weather sets in.

Start seeds indoors in January and/or February for transplanting into your garden in April. At transplanting time, amend the soil with an all-purpose fertilizer. Leave at least 2-3 feet between plants. When you see pea sized tomatoes, top the soil around your plant with 2" of organic compost. Every 10-14 days foliar feed each plant with ½ cup of worm tea plus 4 tablespoons of Agri-Gro mixed into 1 gallon of water. Spray the leaves with this mixture throughout the growing season.

Let plants dry a bit between waterings (until soil feels dry 2 inches down), and as fruit ripens, water even less (until soil is dry 3 inches down). This will not only head off excessive wateriness and cracking, but it will increase your plants' yield and intensify the tomatoes' flavor.

Train indeterminate plants to grow up stakes or place them inside wire cages to elevate the foliage for better air circulation and keep fruit off the ground. Remove suckers-side branches that form in the joints where leaves join the stems-by pinching them out just beyond the first two leaves that develop.

Begin picking tomatoes when they reach full variety size and color. Gently twist and pull from the vine. If your plant looks like it may be over-producing, you can also harvest some as they start to ripen and let them finish indoors. If you like fried green tomatoes, harvest as they reach full size just as the first color change begins. Do not store tomatoes in the refrigerator as this will make them soft and mealy.

### **Health Benefits of Tomatoes**

- Abundant source of antioxidants
- Rich in vitamins and minerals
- Reduces cholesterol and protects the heart
- Improves vision, helps with digestive health
- Lowers hypertension, helps manage diabetes

Tomatoes are considered the world's healthiest food!