



TOP TOMATO GROWING TIPS

Tomatoes are a very popular backyard “vegetable” as they are not difficult to grow. Following are some handy tips if you are new to growing tomatoes.

WARMTH is required to get your seeds to turn into seedlings. Once germinated, take them into natural light, in a sheltered spot outside.

CARE OF YOUR SEEDLING while it is still developing – Pot up the jiffy pellet with the seedling into a small plastic or biodegradable pot with some decent potting mix or compost. Leave it outside on sunny days but bring it inside overnight if the temperature dips below 10°C. Do not allow it to dry out. Water occasionally with an organic liquid fertiliser to speed up the developing leaves.

BEST TIME TO PLANT YOUR TOMATO in the ground or final pot is from mid-October to early-November. Allow your seedling to develop sets of true leaves before considering putting it in its final place.



PLANTING IN THE GROUND

1. Choose an area that will get at least **6 hours** of direct sunlight a day. **Check pH and adjust** by adding lime if needed (pH 6.5-6.8 ideal). If you are adding lime, wait 2 weeks before further soil preparation.
2. Prepare an area **about 60cm x 60cm** by adding any or all of the following: compost, cow manure or mushroom compost. Add a few handfuls of pelletised organic manure (eg Dynamic Lifter) at the same time. Water this all in well and then wait for a couple of weeks for it to settle before planting.
3. If the plants are tall growing you must **stake** the plant. Add the stake at the same time as planting the seedling.
4. When planting, you can **plant the seedling** up to the level of its first set of leaves, burying part of the stem. The plant will send out extra roots along its stem, making for a stronger plant.
5. After planting, water it in well. If you have any **Seasol** (seaweed concentrate), use this when watering fortnightly.
6. Plants will benefit from an occasional **pinch of potash** to promote flowering and fruiting. Do this after planting and then every 4-6 weeks after that. Water in well each time.
7. **Consistent watering** is essential. If the soil is allowed to dry out in between watering, the developing fruit can show signs of water deficiency in a sunken and brown end on the tomato. This is known as Blossom End Rot. However, when you have a lot of green fruit turning to red and are waiting for them to ripen, hold off a bit of watering as the flavours of the tomatoes will intensify if not over-watered.
8. **Mulching** is important to help stop soil drying out. Any of the straw mulches are best and can be placed right up against the stem. Mulch straight after planting. Plant some **basil** around the base to use together with the ripening tomatoes; or some **marigolds** for their soil-disease fighting capabilities.

PLANTING IN A POT FOR DETERMINATE (DWARF) VARIETIES

1. Choose a pot that is at least 2 buckets in size. If you want to use a decorative pot that is terracotta or ceramic, get a **plastic planter pot** that will fit inside the decorative pot. Plastic will not dry out as quickly as the terracotta (unglazed) pots.
2. Use a **good quality potting mix**, not garden soil. Use one that has slow release fertiliser in it already and water-saving crystals. If you make compost, use some of it mixed 50/50 with the potting mix for extra “oomph” for the plant.
3. Plant as above, Steps 3-6
4. **Watering** is especially important with pot grown tomatoes as the potting mix can dry out quickly and then become water-repelling. Consistently moist is critical.
5. **Mulching** can also be done in a pot, but do some edge planting of basil and/ marigolds as well for extra taste and colour.