

GROWING TOMATOES



We enjoy fresh tomatoes, so why not grow them? There is a long list of rules, but for now just forget all that and let's talk about their culture.

One of the most important things is to get them off to a good start. The soil should be well drained and full of nutrients. Work the soil up well with a tiller or by hand then sprinkle a generous amount of 5-10-10 over the row area. This should be all the fertilizer that the plants need for the entire growing season. Work this fertilizer into the ground and make a ditch about five inches deep in the row where the plants are to go. Mark off plant holes about every two and one half feet.

You must decide what kind of plants and how many. For the average family, 15 should be ample. Two plants of an early variety, such as **Small Fry**, would come on early and produce about a gallon of small fruit before the plant dies. The main crop variety should be planted at the same time and should start ripening about 10 days later. **Jet Star** is an excellent variety with vigor and produces large smooth fruit. They should bear until frost if kept free of disease.

Start out by digging a hole about five inches deep and place your plant in the bottom. Hold the plant up while about two inches of dirt is pushed around the roots. Then dump in about a pint

of water to settle the dirt around the roots. Fill the rest of the hole to ground level. Roots will form on any stem that is covered. If all this planting can be done on a cloudy day, there will be less shock to the tender plant.

When shopping for plants, do not buy the bargain of the day. Not all varieties do well here, as we have cool nights and many cloudy days. The tomato is a warm weather plant and will sit and sulk when cold. Do not buy a slow maturing variety as they will still be green in September. If possible, talk to an experienced gardener and find out what s/he is planting. Many of these old gardeners can help you a lot. Another bad mistake that some gardeners make is to buy plants that are blooming or have small fruit sets. These over mature plants do not have large enough roots to produce and will soon fizzle out. The target date for planting is about May 10.

Throughout the growing season it is very important to supply a constant amount of moisture. About once a week should do, depending on your soil type. If moisture supply is erratic, blossom-end rot may develop. Look at your plants and see what they need. Do not flood your plants so water stands for long periods as the roots will be deprived of oxygen and will die. Tomatoes should not be planted in the shade and should

have at least eight hours of sunshine. Strong wind will whip your plants and they will do little.

Your garden should be protected from dogs, insects and romping children. The stems are growing vigorously, are quite tender and should be left alone. Crowded, thick rows can bring on a lot of other unhealthy conditions. Nitrogen fertilizers cause excessive growth and should be avoided.

There are all kinds of systems of staking and tying up your plants. Cages are sold in most garden stores and some people make their own. Just don't get worked up about this staking and caging deal. Every time you prune off stems and leaves you reduce the crop. A few newspapers put under fruit that is lying on the ground will prevent a lot of rot.

Many people with limited space grow a lot of fruit in five gallon cans. For some of the smaller plants a two-gallon can will do. A hanging basket of **Small Fry** plants are not only attractive but productive. Watering in confined space is very critical.

Tomatoes are a very fussy plant, but when treated with respect do produce heavy crops. Most families can have all the fruit they need in this area. If you get into trouble call a Master Gardener; his service is free.

—O.S. Headlee
747-2922

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"Think Excellence Today" is the name of an upcoming series of programs which will focus on business trends, individual achievement, and the challenges presented by our rapidly changing economy. On May 14 and 15, national and local speakers will address such topics as business planning, marketing, creative thinking, venture capital and competition. Giant screen video presentations with such titles as "Megatrends" and "Brain Power" will offer additional food for thought. The program will be held in the Hult Center, at a cost of \$45 per day, with special rates available.

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