

Tomato Info

Backyard Heirloom Seeds & Herbs

Tip: Use brown bags or baggies and rubber band over drying blooms to catch seeds from falling while drying & harvesting seeds. Also, Seeds are living plants and need to be stored properly for long term storage. The freezer is a good idea if you plan to store longer than one planting season. A sealed bag in a rigid sealed container in a cool, dark, humidity free area will work short term.

Tomato Indeterminate vines will require support. For the earliest tomatoes, start growing tomato plants indoors and transplant to the garden after there is no longer a danger of frost. Place individual tomato plants, including roots and dirt, in watered holes. Garden soil should be enriched with compost or aged manure. Use mulch while the tomato plants are still only a few feet tall to ensure moisture retention. For best results with your tomato plants, be sure to use a fertilizer with a high calcium content. This will help prevent blossom-end rot. Do not allow moisture levels to fluctuate too much - this will help prevent cracking. Water directly onto the soil, not the plant.

Planting: Tomatoes are tender plants and are very susceptible to frost damage. Start seeds indoors 6-8 weeks before the last frost date in your area. Sow 2-3 tomato seeds in 1x1" cells and thin to 1 plant after germination. Cover tomato seeds with ¼" soil and provide a constant soil temperature of 21-26°C (70-80°F). Once tomato plants are up, a growing light is necessary or seedlings will become tall and spindly. After tomato plants develop 1-2 sets of true leaves, transplant into 3x3" or 4x4" pots. Use a water soluble fertilizer every two weeks starting at half strength and increasing to full strength over 6 weeks. Tomato Seedlings benefit from watering with Epsom salts, use 1 Tbsp of Epsom salts per gallon. Transplant tomatoes after all danger of frost has passed. When transplanting, space 24-36" apart with rows at least 36-48" apart. Tomatoes do well with asparagus, basil, bush bean, cabbage family, carrot, celery, chive, cucumber, garlic, lettuce, onion, pepper.

Growing: Tomatoes prefer a full sun location, preferably with good air circulation. Soil pH of 6.0-6.5. Tomatoes are heavy feeders and prefer a warm, well drained soil of good fertility and cultivation. Add plenty of compost and well rotted manure prior to planting tomatoes. Feed regularly during the growing season with a compost tea or well balanced fertilizer. Avoid excessive nitrogen, particularly before fruit set. Provide even moisture during fruit set and development. Excessive watering can increase tomato size but decrease flavor. Use Epsom salts to improve growth, mix 2 Tbsp/gallon of water and feed to plants every other watering.

Harvesting: Pick tomatoes when fruit is firm and turning red. Overripe tomatoes rot quickly. Just before the end of season burst of really cold weather-pull plants and hang upside down in a garage and let fruit ripen. Fruit has been known to last until January and stays nice and fresh this way.

Saving Seed: Cross-pollination between modern tomato varieties seldom occurs, except in potato leaf varieties which should be separated by the length of the garden. Heirloom Varieties will need to be separated. Do not save seeds from double fruits or from the first fruits of large-fruited varieties. Pick at least one ripe fruit from each of several plants. Squeeze seeds and juice into a cup and let ferment until mold begins /wash in a fine metal strainer, spread on a paper plate and dry.

Tomatillo

Planting: Sow indoors ¼" deep in pots or flats 6 weeks before the last frost. Thin seedlings when 2" tall and transplant into individual pots. Plant outdoors 24" apart in rows 36" apart. Culture is very similar to tomatoes. Plants can be trellised to keep well contained and the fruits off the dirt, or the plants can be allowed to sprawl on the ground.

Seed Saving: Tomatillos will not cross-pollinate. Select fully ripe fruits to save for seed. Pick at least one ripe fruit from each of several plants. Squeeze seeds and juice into a strainer and wash, spread on a paper plate and dry.